

Issue — 8

Give and Take

Manual





Manual

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Give and Take

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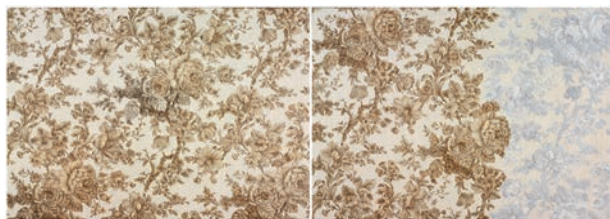
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(cover)

Louise Hopkins
English, b. 1965
2/7 (detail), 1997
Oil on reverse of patterned fabric (diptych)
Overall: 92.7 × 130.8 cm. (36 × 51 ½ in.)
Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary
British Art 2007.18
© The Artist and courtesy The Artist

(inside cover)

Possibly Bromley Hall, textile
manufacturer
English, 1694–1823
Furnishing Textile (detail), ca. 1780
Copperplate printed cotton plain
weave
Length: 237.5 cm. (93 ½ in.)
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund
2008.9.3





Yinka Shonibare, MBE

British, b. 1962

Un Ballo in Maschera (Courtiers V), 2004

Three mannequins on glass bases, Dutch

wax-printed cotton fabric, leather shoes

Overall: 170.2 × 304.8 × 182.9 cm. (67 × 120 × 72 in.)

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary

British Art 2005.52

© Yinka Shonibare MBE. All Rights Reserved,

DACS/ ARS, NY 2017

Mary-Kim Arnold is the author of *Litany for the Long Moment* (Essay Press, 2017). Her poetry and prose has been published in *Tin House*, *The Georgia Review*, *Day One*, and *Hyperallergic*. She serves on the Advisory Committee for *The Rumpus*.

Emily Banas is the curatorial assistant of decorative arts and design at the RISD Museum, specializing in American and European decorative arts, design, and craft of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Pia Camil (RISD BFA 2003, Painting) lives and works in Mexico City. Recent solo exhibitions include Blum & Poe and the New Museum (both New York, 2016) and the Contemporary Arts Center (Cincinnati, 2015). Her work is associated with the Mexican urban landscape, the aesthetic language of modernism, and the politics of consumerism.

John Dunnigan is a designer, maker, and educator. He holds the Schiller Family Chair in Furniture Design at RISD. As an Andrew W. Mellon Faculty Fellow at the RISD Museum, his current research includes teaching and learning through ancient to contemporary objects.

Claudia J. Ford Claudia J. Ford is a visual artist, and ethnobotanist, and she has worked globally investigating the links between indigenous ecological knowledge and sustainable social and environmental systems. Her research on Inuit art was supported by a RISD Liberal Arts/Museum Faculty Summer Stipend.

Kate Irvin is the RISD Museum's head curator of costume and textiles. Her most recent exhibition is *All of Everything: Todd Oldham Fashion* (2016), and her upcoming shows include *Repair: Thrift to Resistance*. With Laurie Brewer, Irvin authored *Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion* (Yale University Press, 2013).

Josie Johnson is a graduate student in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Brown University and the current graduate proctor in the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the RISD Museum.

Dominic Molon is the Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art at the RISD Museum. His next project, scheduled to open in April 2018, is a major presentation of the museum's contemporary collection, titled *Everything That Rises Must Converge*.

Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi is an artist, art historian, and curator of African art at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College. His most recent publication is *New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) Histories in Africa* (LIT Verlag, 2015), a book examining independent art spaces in Africa.

Alexandra M. Peck is a PhD student in anthropology at Brown University, where she studies under professors Robert Preucel and Patricia Rubertone. Her research interests include Coast Salish art, tribal museums, and cultural change along the Pacific Northwest Coast.

Robert W. Preucel is a professor of anthropology and the director of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology at Brown University. His research interests include archaeological theory and practice, material semiotics, and Native American studies.

Wendy Red Star works across disciplines to explore the intersections of traditional Native American ideologies and colonialist structures, both historically and in contemporary society. An avid researcher, Red Star seeks to incorporate and recast her research, offering new and unexpected perspectives in work that is inquisitive, witty, and unsettling.

Jessica Urlick is the assistant conservator of costume and textiles at the RISD Museum, where her work focuses on preserving the museum's textile collection and preparing objects for exhibition. Her research interests include conservation theory and exploring new exhibition techniques.

Kelly Walters is a multimedia designer whose artistic practice investigates the intersection of black cultural identity and language in mainstream media. She holds an MFA in graphic design from RISD and is currently an assistant professor of graphic design at the University of Connecticut.

loose
photographs
throughout

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Give and Take: Art As Social Exchange

Mary-Kim Arnold

Is there an exchange, is there a resemblance to the sky which is admitted
to be there and the stars which can be seen. Is there. That was a question.

—Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

The earliest known use of the expression “give and take” can be traced to horse racing. It referred to races in which larger, stronger horses carried more weight, and smaller ones, less. Implied therein is an accounting for relative capacities. In such a race, the goal remains the same—crossing the finish line first—but introducing this variable highlights the relationship between the competing horses. A win is only meaningful if each horse can be considered in relation to the others.

Contemporary usage typically relies on the notion of “mutual yielding,” which seems to have gained currency toward the end of the eighteenth century. What remains significant is the emphasis on interconnectedness. Meaning is made in the interstitial spaces.

Artist Sal Randolph uses cash as a literal interpretation of social exchange. In a piece she calls *Give and Take*, she leaves money in public places—on a plate or with a note to indicate it’s an intentional act. At times, she will place calls for participants in which she gives them a sum of money, and then they sit together for a while—forty-five minutes or an hour—to discuss the implications of this new relationship the exchange has created between them.

In Minneapolis, a community art project similarly operates on a framework of social exchange. Organized around two questions, What do I know and What do I want to know, Give & Take brings members of the public together to exchange knowledge, skills, and resources, with the expectation that longer-term social cohesion will result.

In both these examples, at least one aspect of the exchange is visible, concrete—in the first case, money changes hands and in the second, an observable skill, such as how to upholster a chair or how to plan an event, is taught. What I see implicit in both as well is a question of social indebtedness: what does

living in community require? What does it provide? In connecting one action to another, the phrase “give and take” constructs a social narrative. We are now in relation to each other through a dynamic, ongoing co-creation.

Art—in its creation, distribution, valuation, and preservation—has long provoked, illuminated, and grappled with questions of social equity, social exchange, and social indebtedness, which makes it vulnerable to attack in a culture that is deeply invested in the supremacy of the individual. If I believe that it is by my action alone that I succeed or fail, then what use is there for others? I simply affix my blinders and run the track as fast as I can.

These are not new questions. We do however, find ourselves in a historical moment that makes our interconnectedness both more visible and more complex. Boundaries—physical, geographical, ideological—have become more porous, and the institutions that have provided structure—while always deeply flawed—have shown themselves to be more vulnerable than some of us would have liked to believe. Old systems are breaking down, giving way. New ones will take hold.

“Money is a collective dream,” Randolph says of her work. Money is an act of social imagination. It is of value because we believe in it. So too, our faith in other systems of social construction: political institutions, religion, our concepts of race and class. “Customs,” she says, “in any society, develop the force of reality.”

One role of art is to destabilize the force of reality. To unsettle, to provoke inquiry. Like any social narrative, this requires participation. To “take” is also to receive, accept. The capacity to *take in*.

In Gertrude Stein’s quote above, the oddness of her syntax requires a kind of attentiveness to each word, each phrase, each movement from one phrase to the next. It is a kind of work—active, present participation—to consider the meaning of each word individually and then re-make meaning from the arrangement. This is my mind newly encountering Stein’s more than a century after the words were written. There is something electric about the recognition that these lines are made anew in each encounter, that some new meaning arises. And I think, too, of the sky and the stars she invokes, which she has attempted to remake with these gestures. The way she offers us sky—as vast and unknowable as it is—and we take it with us, if we can.



Vija Celmins
American, b. 1939
Galaxy, from the *Untitled Portfolio*, 1975
Lithograph on Twinrocker handmade rag paper
Sheet: 41.3 × 50.8 cm. (16 1/4 × 20 in.)
Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment
for the Arts 75.110.1
©Vija Celmins, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

From the Files

Madonna and Child by Josie Johnson

Spring 2017

This devotional wood sculpture from late-fifteenth-century Brussels presents the Virgin Mary as a sweet, attentive mother, and Jesus as an energetic, fussy baby, crinkling the pages of the book before him. Only the slender crown, the sparing use of gold-leaf gilding, and the crescent moon beneath Mary's robes subtly hint at their divinity. By the late medieval period, holy figures from the Christian tradition were often depicted as familiar and even human; the Virgin Mary especially had assumed an important role in medieval Christianity as an intercessor to God. The small size of this work, and the relatively light weight of the wood, made it an ideal portable sculpture—large enough to command a sense of presence, but small enough to be moved around.

Indeed, the sculpture has continued to travel over the last century, beginning with its arrival at the RISD Museum in 1915. In 1943, the museum's Education Department began a program that circulated small, thematic groups of museum objects to Providence junior high schools. A photograph from the RISD Archives shows that this Madonna and Child was the single figural sculpture chosen for a kit labeled "Gothic"; its combination of portability, sturdiness, and subtle visual interest would have made this sculpture an ideal object for teaching young students about medieval European art. Unfortunately, these same qualities may have played a role in its misplacement—the sculpture was listed as missing for two decades until it was rediscovered in 2014, still packed in its traveling-exhibition crate from a half-century earlier.

Manual



"Gothic" travel kit, probably 1940s. Image Courtesy RISD Archives



Origin: South Netherlandish (Brussels)
Artist: Unknown
Object: Madonna and Child, 1490–1500

Materials: Wood, paint, gilding
Height: 39.4 cm. (15 1/2 in.)
Acquisition: Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 15.108

Double

Dominic Molon /
Kelly Walters

Take

Dominic Molon: Whit Stillman's 1990 comedy-of-manners film *Metropolitan* features the following exchange at a bar between a preppy New York college freshman and a slightly older version of his probable future self:

YOUNGER MAN. Do you think it's true that generally speaking, people from [our] background are doomed to failure?

MAN AT BAR, *blithely*. Doomed? That would, uh, be far easier. No, we simply fail without being doomed.

It suggests that—angst aside—the class christened by one character as the “urban haute bourgeoisie” (UHB for short) is, regardless of its failures, ultimately insulated from failure's true consequences.

The world-weariness of *Metropolitan's* older UHB character's response finds a pressing retort in Jenny Holzer's *Living* series sign work. The man at the bar contemplates notions of upper-class failure with the casual indifference of whether to eat the olive in his martini or not, while Holzer's work conveys a similar sentiment, albeit with a sense of urgency and alarm.

Street signs address a universal audience. The class-specificity of Holzer's work, however, asks, How do I read this differently based on my current or past (or aspirational) class background or status? Its relatively new home at the RISD Museum is significant both because of Holzer's having received her MFA from RISD in 1977 and the school's role as a destination for the very “affluent college-bound students” her text mentions. (Combined expenses of tuition and room and board at RISD total almost \$60,000 per year.) When seen in the museum's

galleries by RISD students—and, presumably, by students from the other elite colleges in the region—does this work serve as an unwelcome reminder or a valuable warning of the uncertain professional road that lies ahead? Or does its continued relevance go unheeded, considering that it was made more than thirty years ago? Given the inconvenient truths laid down in Holzer's texts throughout the years—*Abuse of Power Comes As No Surprise* from her *Truisms* series (1977–1979), for example—students for whom the message applies might do well to heed its advice.

Conversely, Holzer's sign might offer reassurance to patrician students' plebian counterparts. For the non-UHB, “conventional measures of success” rarely need to be “reassessed,” as a college diploma is often its own measure of success, whereas entering a challenging job market may offer disappointment but probably few hardships they haven't known already. While Holzer's sign might offer the cold comfort of knowing that their “affluent college-bound” peers “face the real prospect of downward mobility,” it could put their own struggles into perspective, and provide added motivation plus a better appreciation of their competitive field.

This work's timeless sangfroid in addressing self-consciousness in relationship to class and the larger educational system makes it one of the more distinctive examples of the *Living* series' ability to communicate internalized conventional wisdom in an insistently external public forum.

**AFFLUENT COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS
FACE THE REAL PROSPECT OF DOWNWARD
MOBILITY. FEELINGS OF ENTITLEMENT
CLASH WITH THE AWARENESS OF IMMINENT
SCARCITY. THERE IS RESENTMENT AT
GROWING UP AT THE END OF AN ERA OF
PLENTY COUPLED WITH REASSESSMENT
OF CONVENTIONAL MEASURES OF SUCCESS.**

Jenny Holzer
American, b. 1950
Living: Affluent college-bound students . . ., 1980–1982
From the *Living* series
Hand-painted enamel on metal sign
53.3 × 58.4 cm. (21 × 23 in.)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2016.5
© 2017 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York

COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENT
PROSPECT OF DOWNWARD
FEELINGS OF ENTITLEMENT
THE AWARENESS OF IMMINENT
THERE IS RESENTMENT
AT THE END OF AN ERA
DEPLED WITH REASSESSMENT
AL MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Jenny Holzer
 American, b. 1950
Living: Affluent college-bound students ... (detail), 1980–1982
 From the *Living* series
 Hand-painted enamel on metal sign
 53.3 × 58.4 cm. (21 × 23 in.)
 Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2016.5
 © 2017 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS),
 New York

Take Double

Dominic Molon /
 Kelly Walters

Kelly Walters: In three bold declarative statements, Jenny Holzer challenges her audience to consider the “plight” of the highly educated college student through a series of contradictions. “Affluence” is set opposite “downward mobility,” “entitlement” is set opposite “imminent scarcity,” and “the end of a plentiful era” is met with “reassessment of conventional measures of success.” These word pairings are carefully chosen in order to identify the connection between privilege, success, and higher education. While *Living: Affluent college-bound students ...* was originally speaking to an early 1980s audience, the attitude that is evoked in this piece is still relevant today.

Higher education provides graduates with access and power. The ability to move into the job market, make money, and establish oneself in a new social class can be made possible with a college degree. Students that fund their tuition by working multiple jobs or through the assistance of student loans maintain a more precarious relationship to higher education. They must work harder to maintain certain grade-point averages or accept more financial debt all while in school. At the same time, entitlement plagues privileged students like a disease. Affluent students who believe they are owed a certain level of success upon the completion of college operate in space where their access to resources including knowledge, professors, peers, tools, books, and job opportunities is infinite.

Holzer exploits this elitist ideology in the *Living* series, and uses bold uppercase text to make her message appear even more urgent and immediate. The design of the handwritten text suggests a highly controlled process compressed to fit within a twenty-one by twenty-three-inch metal frame. This symbolically represents the voice of the affluent college student who feels slighted. The feelings of “resentment” and “scarcity” that Holzer observes in this same affluent college student directly connect to the sense of instability that the working college student experiences daily. The visual translation of instability comes through in the noticeable inconsistencies of each letterform and her lack of precision in its execution.

Ultimately, Holzer wants her viewers to reflect and decide on their own terms whether they agree with her message. In my opinion, the affluent college student is set up for success. If they can eliminate their need to have opportunities handed to them, it will foster a better work ethic, and their success will not just rely on money or social class alone.

Guillaume Beneman, cabinetmaker
French, b. Germany, d. 1811
Drop-Front Secretary (*Secrétaire à Abattant*)
ca. 1800–1810
Mahogany and oak with brass and gilded
bronze mounts, embossed leather, marble top
143.5 × 114.3 × 42.6 cm. (56 ½ × 45 × 16 ¾ in.)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 80.106

Double

Emily Banas /
John Dunnigan

Take

Spring 2017

Emily Banas: This richly ornamented piece of furniture surprises with the incorporation of a drop-front desk and a section of drawers, concealed below by a pair of doors. Known in France as a *secrétaire à abattant* or *secrétaire en armoire*, this secretary reflects a transition in style from the neoclassical period of Louis XVI (reign 1774–1793) to the Empire (1800–1815), elegantly incorporating elements of both.

The overall form and proportions of the piece are characteristic of Louis XVI: harmonious in design, balanced in proportion, and controlled in form—a striking contrast to the curvilinear shapes of the Rococo period (ca. 1730–1760). While most French furniture of the era featured elaborate marquetry—a decorative inlay of various types of wood—this piece’s finely crafted gilt-bronze mounts are highlighted by expansive areas of undecorated mahogany.

Thin lines of brass molding demarcate the areas of decoration and simultaneously unite the façade so that the drop-front desk and the lower doors visually become one. The mounts and ornaments are markedly Empire in style, their influence drawn from Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign, which began in 1798. Beyond being a military endeavor, the expedition into Egypt revealed numerous forms, styles, and ideas that were diligently captured and disseminated in a number of publications. Works such as *Description de l’Égypte* (1809), *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte* (1802) by Dominique-Vivant Denon, and *Recueil de Décorations Intérieures*

(1812) by Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine provided designers with a wealth of visual inspiration.

Egyptian figures form the desk’s front columns, each figure wearing a gold headdress known as the *nemes*, which is associated with the pharaoh. Their elongated rectilinear bodies are perched on delicately carved feet and ornamented in the center with what appears to be the Rod of Asclepius—the serpent-coiled staff of the Greek god of medicine. A pair of opposing lionesses lies under the arch, their paws echoed in the claw feet on which the secretary perches. Whimsical fairy-like figures anchor the center of the façade. Their bodies morph into twisting and curving acanthus leaves and vines, contrasting with the ridged lines that contain them. Below the gray marble top runs a narrow frieze-like band with a palm-leaf motif, characteristic of the ancient Greek and Roman designs that were revived during the Empire period.

Two stamps emblazoned on the exterior identify this piece as the work of Guillaume Beneman, a German cabinetmaker who settled in Paris in 1784 and became a *maître ébéniste* the following year, garnering favor with the Crown. Although stamps were obligatory for every master cabinetmaker in Paris by the 1750s, the regulation was embraced by makers, who viewed it both as a sign of quality and a mode of publicity for their work. A marriage of fine craftsmanship and functionality, this *secrétaire* is likely one of last pieces Beneman created.





Guillaume Beneman, cabinetmaker
 French, b. Germany, d. 1811
 Drop-Front Secretary (*Secrétaire à Abattant*)
 ca. 1800–1810
 Mahogany and oak with brass and gilded
 bronze mounts, embossed leather, marble top
 143.5 × 114.3 × 42.6 cm. (56 ½ × 45 × 16 ¾ in.)
 Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 80.106

Take Double

Emily Banas /
John Dunnigan

John Dunnigan: My first encounter with the *secrétaire à abattant* by Guillaume Beneman was many years ago when it was acquired by the RISD Museum, locked and without keys. The curator of decorative arts showed me some loose panels on the back, and I remember how intrigued I was as we examined the case and discussed how to get into it.

Since then, I've stood in front of the Beneman secretary with many students and asked how you "get into" something like this. The ensuing exchange of ideas often begins with questions about the gilt-bronze mounts, which stand out immediately as an odd assortment of historical references with different levels of abstraction and degrees of plasticity. We soon realize there is an interesting dynamic between the strange but symmetrical mounts and the case. One of the reasons this composition works is because the underlying surface is uniform, which is made possible by the mahogany wood.

Swietenia mahagoni Jacquin is a tropical wood without notable contrast in annual rings, which produces a consistency of grain and color. Valued for its remarkable workability, durability, size, and unique appearance, mahogany's most significant use in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to signify the owner's status, which was reflected in its polished surfaces. The mahogany used in the Beneman secretary was probably taken from Saint-Domingue, a French colony until slave rebellions created the independent nation of Haiti in 1804, restricting French access. By then, most of the Caribbean's ancient virgin forests had been cut down.

Little is known about the workers who harvested the raw materials for this piece, but records show that Guillaume Beneman, trained in Germany, was elevated to the rank of *maître ébéniste* in 1785 in Paris and appointed principal cabinetmaker for the *Garde-Meuble de la Couronne*, which supplied the French royal residences with furniture. Beneman survived the collapse of the *Ancien Régime*, and during the Revolution and Directoire periods (1789–1804), much of his work involved repurposing older furniture by replacing royal insignia and recycling old parts into new furniture. By the beginning of the Empire period, Beneman was creating original works in collaboration with the sculptor Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751–1843), and the RISD secretary, which demonstrates that artistic give and take, comes from this mature period at the end of Beneman's career.

The secretary would have served as an office, giving its owner a place to write letters, lock up documents, and hide valuables. In the upper interior, the central drawers open only by pressing a button hidden behind the upper right drawer. In the lower interior, an even more ingenious pair of secret compartments beneath the bottom drawer can only be accessed by pressing two hidden sets of spring-loaded release mechanisms.

We can start to unlock the Beneman secretary by asking what we see, and by considering how materials and people contributed to the larger culture of production. We can even wonder what our secretary might have witnessed, and what secrets it contained. These suggest that there are multiple keys for "getting into it."

[note on this digital edition]

Wendy Red Star's Artist on Art contribution, *Diplomats of the Crow Nation*, was originally published as individual photographs with accompanying text on the back and inserted throughout the magazine. They are reproduced here all together for clarity on screen.



*Diplomats
of the
Crow Nation*

Wendy Red Star



1873 Crow Delegation



On October 21, 1873, Crow chiefs Sits In The Middle Of The Land (also referred to as Blackfoot), Iron Bull, Long Horse, Bear Wolf, White Calf, Mo-mukh-pi-tche, Old Crow, and One Who Leads The Old Dog, and their wives Pretty Medicine Pipe, Stays With The Horses, Mrs. Sits In The Middle Of The Land, and Mrs. Iron Bull set off on a long journey to Washington, D.C., by horse and train. Known as the Crow Delegation, they represented the Crow Nation's concerns about U.S. State Department intentions to reduce Crow territory and relocate the agency, as well as the encroachment of enemy tribes on vital Crow hunting grounds.

...



Stripped, fringed
blanket probably
made in Northern
New Mexico →
popular trade
item →

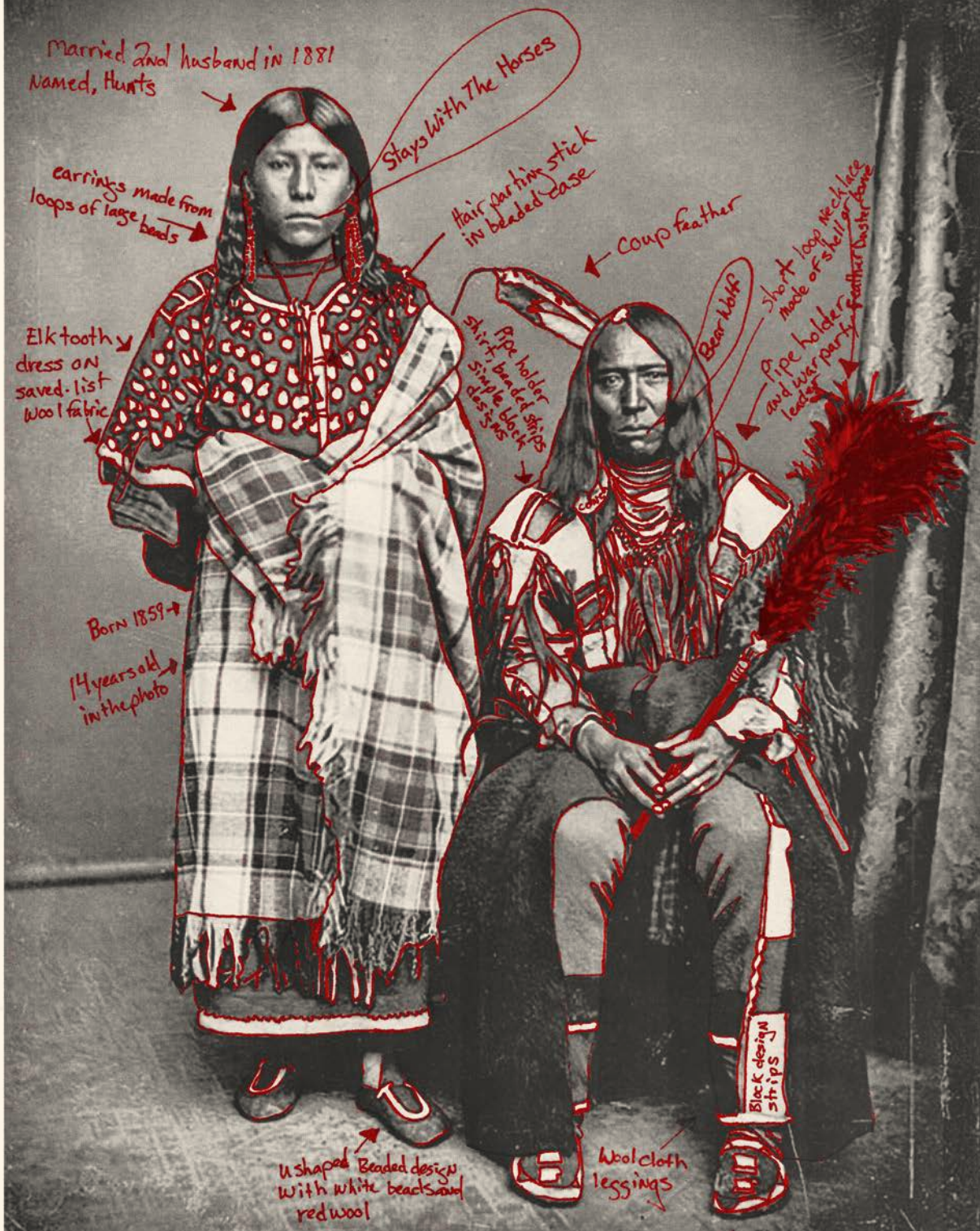
Mrs. Sits in The Middle of The Land

At least four wives
including Lakota
woman

mother: Strikes Plenty
Men or Kills Plenty
Brother: Busy Wolf
Daughter: Two Buffaloes
Sons: Big Snake
Goes Well Known
cuts A Hole in it
Mountain Crow

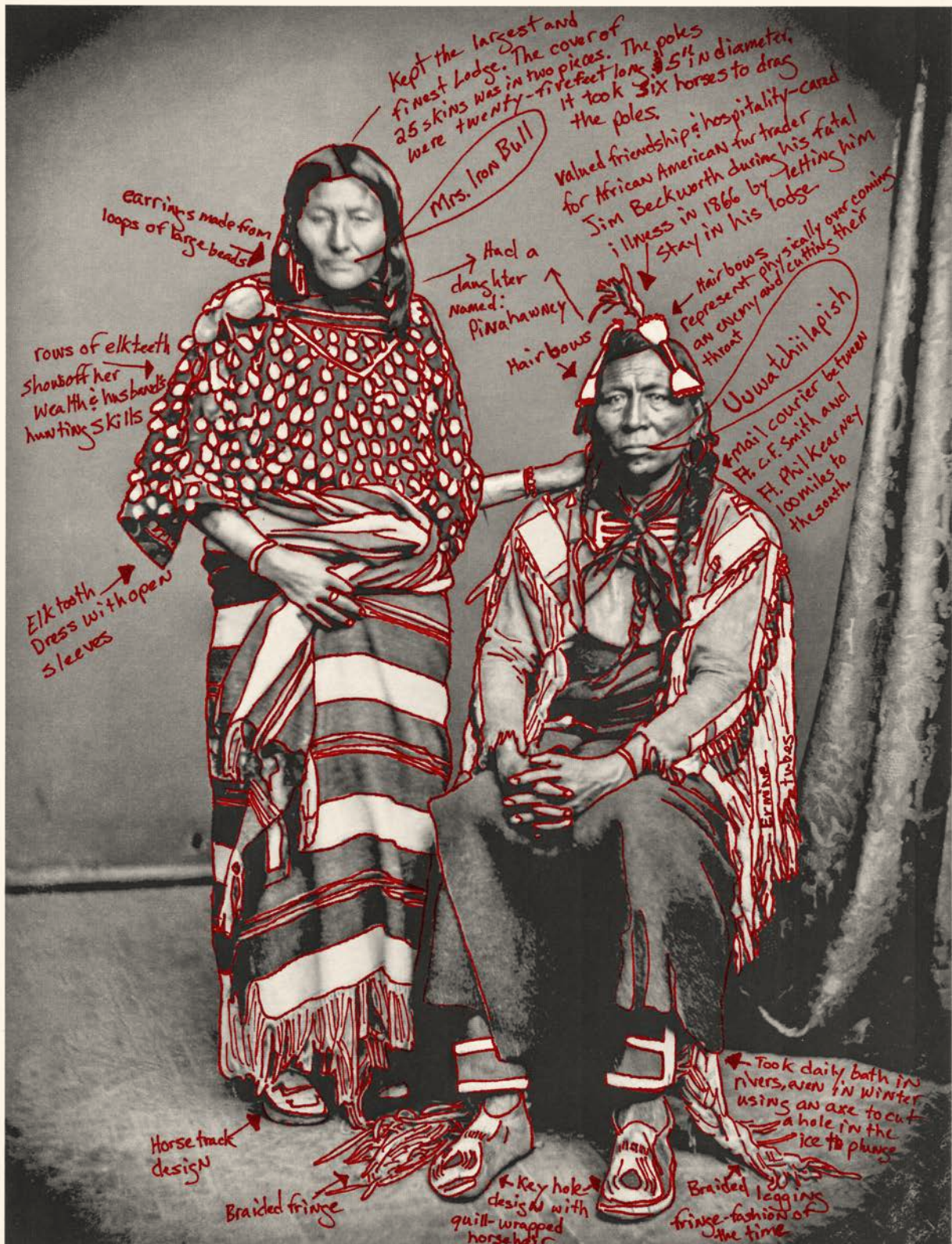
Awi Kukulawachich
born in 1795
6ft 2", muscular
48" chest.

↑
buckskin leggings
with quilled black
designs.



The Crow Delegation, along with Agent Pease and interpreters Frank Shane and Bernard Prero would meet with Secretary of State Columbus Delano and President Ulysses S. Grant to discuss these matters. However, during their stay in Washington D.C., they were overwhelmed with a “red-carpet treatment” that derailed their own agenda in favor of that of the U.S. government under the Grant administration, known for scandal and corruption.

...



Kept the largest and finest lodge. The cover of 25 skins was in two pieces. The poles were twenty-five feet long. It took six horses to drag the poles.

Mrs. Iron Bull

valued friendship; hospitality - cared for African American fur trader Jim Beckwith during his fatal illness in 1866 by letting him stay in his lodge.

earrings made from loops of large beads

rows of elk teeth show off her wealth & husband's hunting skills

Had a daughter named: Pinahawney

Hair bows

Hair bows represent physically overcoming an enemy and cutting their throat

Uwatchesilapish

mail courier between Ft. C.F. Smith and Ft. Phil Kearney 100 miles to the south

Elk tooth dress with open sleeves

Horse track design

Braided fringe

Key hole design with quill-wrapped horsehair

Braided leggings fringe - fashion of the time

Took daily bath in rivers, even in winter using an axe to cut a hole in the ice to plunge

Fringe tubes

At the start, the undertaking of the Crow Delegation was optimistically yet patronizingly described in the Bozeman *Avant Courier* as follows:

A delegation of Chiefs of Mountain Crow Indians left Bozeman yesterday morning for Washington in charge of Major F.D. Pease, on a visit to the President. We doubt if a finer body of Indians ever visited the Great Father before. They are fine-looking, remarkably intelligent, and have always been true friends of the whites. Blackfoot and Iron Bull are the most prominent chiefs in this part. We bespeak for these noble red men a kind reception and hope that the President and Indian Department will be liberal and generous to them, for these Crows have conducted themselves towards the whites in this section much better than Indians generally do on the border.

...

The Crow chiefs and their wives experienced many firsts as they travelled more than two thousand miles to Washington D.C. Several of the delegation members became ill during the train ride from Salt Lake to St. Louis. Where ever they went, crowds of gawking people surrounded them and made it difficult to walk the streets and get to their hotels.

...

Grand daughter of trapper Pierre Duchien
: Bear In The Woods.

24 yrs old in 1873

Pretty Medicine Pipe

she is 22 yrs younger

They had 2
Sons named "His
Enemy Is Dangerous"
he died July 31, 1894

Pompadour
hair style

36 yrs old in 1873

Peelatchixaaish
classic double-love, quill wrapped
horse hair shirt

In 1886
married 2nd husband
Chief Spotted Horse
they had 3 children
• By herself
• Plenty Arrows
• Strikes The Rider

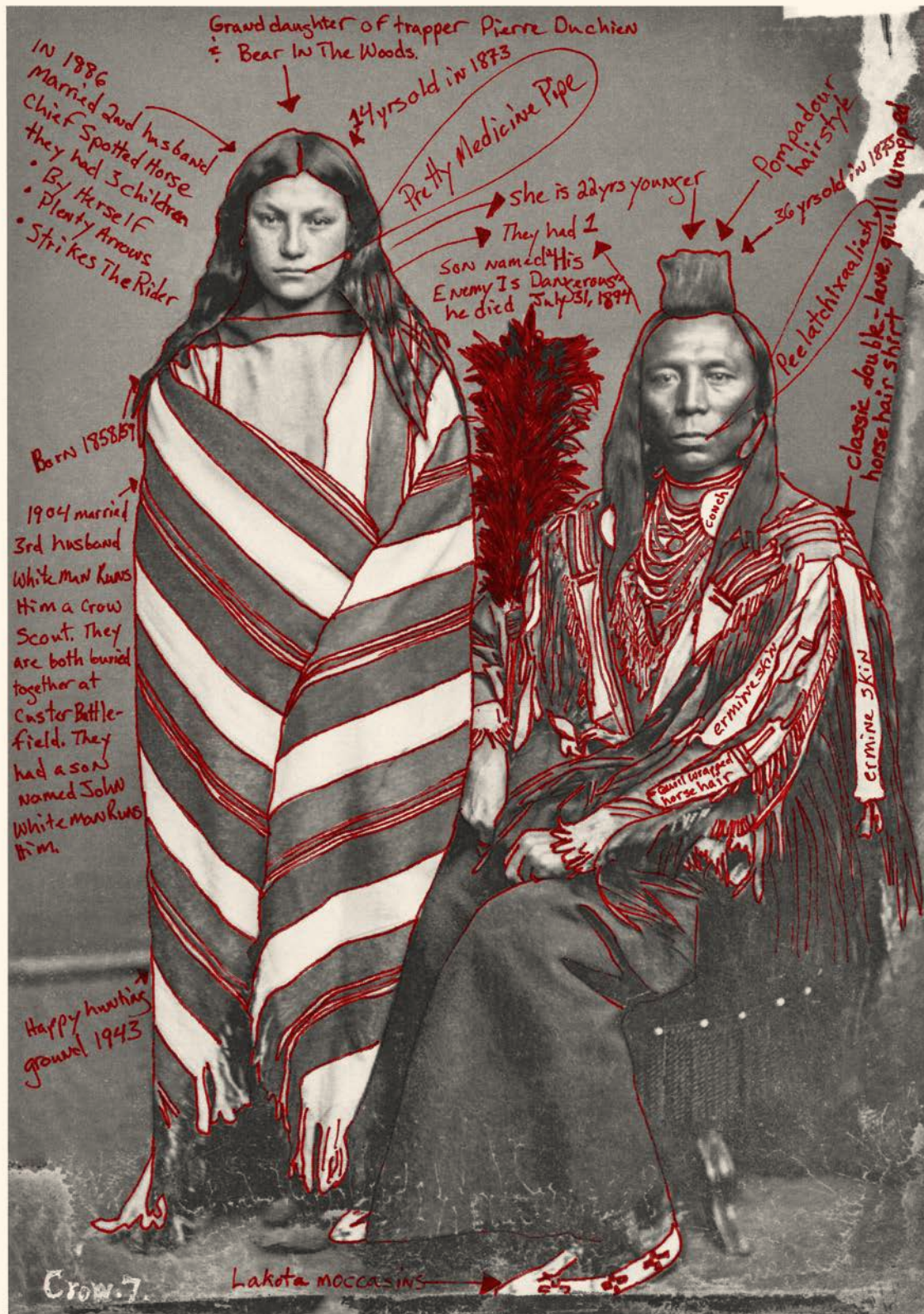
Born 1858/59

1904 married
3rd husband
White man Kuns
him a Crow
Scout. They
are both buried
together at
Custer Battle-
field. They
had a son
named Sohn
White man Kuns
him.

Happy hunting
ground 1943

Crow.7

Lakota moccasins





Thin Belly

loop necklace either shell or bone
hair lock fringe rounded triangle bit

Mo-mukh-pi-tche

Human or
horse hair
locks

One Who Leads The Old Dog

pipe holder shirt
double - love quilt
fringe

wool leggings

Probably
Lakota moccasins

Once in D.C., they were supplied with cigars, theater tickets, grapes, raisins, alcohol, and outings to the nearby attractions of Mount Vernon, Arlington Cemetery, and Rock Creek Park.

...

The Crow chiefs were also exposed to “extras” of a darker kind of entertainment. Visits to brothel houses and burlesque shows were arranged by Benjamin F. Beveridge, a D.C. saloon keeper, whose family was sustained by the delegation business for more than fifty years. This scandal and misuse of government funds was uncovered by government auditors while reviewing expenditures relating to Indian affairs.

...

"We have talked three days, and my tongue
is not tired."



Ironically, a more obvious clue to these tantalizing “extras” is provided from an official group portrait of the Crow Delegation. In the photo, each chief proudly holds a peacock feather duster. The chiefs, accompanied by Agent Pease, were entertained by a fan dancer, and were so impressed with her performance they asked to meet her after the show. The dancer gave each of the chiefs a peacock feather duster, and in the Crow custom of showing reciprocation, the chiefs gifted their eagle fans in return. As a consequence, when the chiefs returned to Montana, a new fashion trend was born. Sub-chiefs and young Crow men were eager to acquire their own feather dusters. The demand was so high that a local trader began to supply the dusters. Photographs of Crow men well into the 1900s depict them toting around their feather dusters on horseback and including them in formal studio portraits.



Seal Hunter Stone 9/30 Cape Moresby 1957 Pictograph

Reciprocal Exchange

Hunting, Japanese Printmaking, and Inuit Artists

Claudia J. Ford

An Inuit hunter stands in an attitude of calm strength over the breathing hole of a seal. His harpoon appears to be holstered across two forked sticks; it is close at hand, but not in a ready-to-strike position. This stonecut print is *Seal Hunter* [Fig. 1], one of a collection of thirty-five Inuit prints, drawings, and engravings gifted to the RISD Museum by Canadians Alma and James Houston. The image was drawn by Joseph Pootoogook and printed as part of the inaugural collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, an artists group located at the western end of the Hudson Strait, just below the Arctic Circle on the southern tip of Baffin Island.

FIG. 1

Joseph Pootoogook
Canadian (Inuit), 1887–1958
Lukta Qiatsuk, printer
Canadian (Inuit), 1928–2004
Seal Hunter, ca. 1957
Stonecut print on paper
Sheet: 31.8 × 23.8 cm. (12 ½ × 9 ¾ in.)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James A. Houston 77.148.1
© Dorset Fine Arts

Inuit artists began working with Houston in a one-room shop erected in late 1956, and the 1959 inaugural collection of this remote (yet consequently celebrated) co-operative marked the beginning of an unusual confluence of artistic encounters and exchanges. The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative was the setting for interactions between Japanese and Inuit printmaking traditions and techniques, as well as the site of a community art-studio culture of interchange and experimentation. Artists from the early years, including Pootoogook, were actively documenting the encounters, exchanges, and challenges of the traditional nomadic life of the Inuit, and the connections between humans and nature, environment and community, family and spiritual customs, and significant Inuit hunting rituals, especially for caribou and seal.

I am fascinated with the strong beauty of the seal hunter's pose. What seems at first glance to be merely a simple picture of a facet of Inuit life reveals itself, with deeper inspection, to be the outlines of an important story of indigenous ecological knowledge and traditions. For thousands of years the Inuit people of the circumpolar Arctic communities lived completely enmeshed in the rhythms and demands of a harsh and unforgiving environment. Inuit peoples' survival was never guaranteed. Their thriving for generations in this stark landscape could only be the result of carefully following the knowledge and traditions of their ancestors, handed down from person to person and across communities, through story and ritual. These traditional narratives were exchanges of the critical, profound knowledge associated with long-term occupancy of a specific place. They were tales of cultural and environmental survival.

Seal Hunter depicts a familiar scene from circumpolar hunting societies, involving what Canadian anthropologist Paul Nadasdy calls a long-term relationship of "reciprocal exchange." In Inuit and neighboring indigenous societies, it is considered that the animal controls the hunt, gifting themselves to a skilled hunter who incurs a debt of humility and respect towards the animal, enacted through culturally specific and careful rituals for the killing, sharing, and full use of the animal's remains.¹ Hunting was, and in many societies still is, considered a spiritual, holy occupation, undertaken solely for food and clothing and never for sport. All aspects of the hunt were ritual elements that indicated respect for the animal and ensured the hunter's success.

Pootoogook's hunter waits at the seal's air hole, dressed warmly in a traditional Inuit parka, standing in front of a wall of ice where he might remain for hours, in blustery minus-sixty-degree weather. The work is marked by strong lines of sharp positive to negative contrast, making maximum use of the graphic impact and eloquence of the black and white

print, noticeable in the rendering of the expressive face of the hunter and the subtle movement of the seal. In addition to the hunter's attitude of stoic strength and calm, there is a hint of humor to Pootoogook's portrayal. The seal has acknowledged the hunter's not-yet-lethal presence by playfully sticking its nose up through the air hole. The effect is that of a conversation between animal and hunter, a relationship of respect and reciprocity.

Viewing *Seal Hunter*, I am reminded of the seriousness of the environmental crises that we all currently face, especially the Arctic circumpolar Inuit communities. These are challenges that demand an attitude of deep curiosity and commitment. When I was given the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies at Antioch University's Environmental Studies program, I decided to devote myself to considering and understanding indigenous ecological knowledge. This course of study appealed to me for a number of reasons. Personally, I was interested in further exploration of the roots of my father's Native American heritage. I was also curious

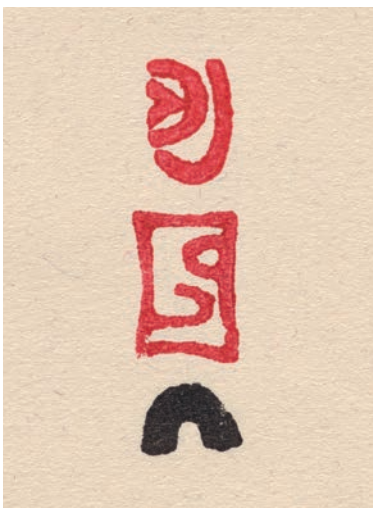
to understand more about the indigenous cultures and environmental traditions of the people I had worked with during the thirty years I spent employed in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

What I discovered is that while Western culture is predisposed to control, subdue, consume, or exploit nature, indigenous cultures were and remain committed to understanding the mutuality of the relationships between the environment, humans, and other elements and living beings. This commitment to a deep knowledge of place is the foundation of decision-making in the face of novel or unusual challenges. This connectedness has always been the basis of a sustainable way of life for the Inuit and other indigenous societies. This commitment and connectedness are beautifully portrayed in Pootoogook's *Seal Hunter*.

We know that *Seal Hunter* is Joseph Pootoogook's work because of the first of three small seals on the lower left of the print [Fig. 2]. The artists, printers, and the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative placed their seals on editions of thirty to fifty prints in the early years of co-operative shows, under the direction of James Houston. Houston worked as a civil servant of the Canadian

FIG. 2

Joseph Pootoogook
Canadian (Inuit), 1887–1958
Lukta Qiatsuk, printer
Canadian (Inuit), 1928–2004
Seal Hunter (detail), ca. 1957–1959
Stonecut print on paper
Sheet: 31.8 × 23.8 cm. (12½ × 9½ in.)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James A. Houston 77.148.1
© Dorset Fine Arts



federal government and was posted in Cape Dorset from 1956 to 1962 with his wife and two young children. A trained artist, he had studied in Ontario and Paris and had well-established skills as an illustrator. As a Canadian government officer, and to encourage the economic potential of Inuit arts, Houston—with the help of Joseph Pootoogook's son, Kananginak Pootoogook—created the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative as an artists' shop and design studio. By the time that the co-operative was founded, Houston had already been involved in Inuit arts and crafts for ten years, encouraging the artistic talents and international market potential of Inuit artists, beginning with the men's traditional carvings of serpentine sea stone, walrus ivory, caribou antler and whalebone incising, and the women's folk arts of sealskin and caribou-skin appliqué. From the studio's beginnings, Houston actively supported the establishment of a collaborative culture of group proofing, printing, trial and error, and experimentation, and the space eventually functioned as print studio, archival center, source of supplies, and marketing company. Joseph Pootoogook was an elder leader in the Cape Baffin Inuit community when Houston and the initial group of Inuit artists set up the shop, and Kananginak Pootoogook was one of the original members of the co-operative. Father and son collaborated on prints at the co-op, with Joseph supplying drawings that were translated into stone carvings and printed by Kananginak. The practice of collaborative studio work, often across generations and within families, continues today in Cape Dorset's Inuit community.

Houston spent October 1958 through February 1959 in Japan, studying with many of the leading Japanese printmakers of the mid-twentieth century, especially celebrated woodblock printmaker Hiratsuka Un'ichi. During these four months, Houston worked six days a week, ten to twelve hours a day as an advanced student in Hiratsuka's studios, learning and practicing the techniques, tools, and aesthetic impact of the most important schools of Japanese printmaking. Direct hand-transfer woodcut printmaking is a centuries-old Japanese tradition, and Hiratsuka considered Houston a serious and gifted student.² When Houston returned to Cape Dorset in the winter of 1959, he came back with new skills and carried examples of celebrated Japanese prints that were hung in the studio for the aesthetic inspiration and technical direction of the Inuit artists. Houston and the first group of West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative artists and printmakers worked collaboratively, assimilating, translating, and transforming Japanese print techniques to suit the visual language of traditional Inuit subject matter. Work had begun in the little shop before

Houston's trip, mostly experimenting with technique and producing small works such as Christmas cards. We are not certain of exactly when Joseph Pootoogook drew his seal hunter, or whether it was made before or after Houston returned from Japan. We do know that *Seal Hunter* was an early product of the co-operative, and included in the group's 1959 inaugural collection—the first published, catalogued, and exhibited body of work following Houston's trip to Japan.

Adapting Japanese techniques and tools to Inuit skills and experiences, the Cape Dorset artists experimented with relief printing and color stencils, creating linoleum and other block prints on fabric, and linocuts and stone prints on a variety of Japanese and other imported hand-made papers. The Inuit artists made new tools based on traditional Japanese printmaking knives, chisels, and barens (a tool used to apply pressure to the block to transfer the ink), using locally available materials such as sealskin for barens, caribou antlers for chisel handles, and polar bear hairs for brushes. This Japanese-to-Inuit cultural exchange was technical, aesthetic, and personal.³ The Inuit artists appreciated the simple modernist style of the Japanese masters; they recreated and transformed this style through illustrations of Inuit myths, Arctic animals, hunting scenes, and family life.

At the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, artists, designers, draughtspersons, and printers worked separately but in collaboration. All artists, at all stages of the creative process, had creative agency, and while Inuit men were traditionally stone carvers and so drew on their skills for the carving of stone blocks, almost immediately Inuit women joined in print designs and illustrations, even bringing paper back to their homes to draw while attending to their families and domestic duties. The results of this gender-inclusive studio culture of interchange, collaboration, and experimentation are seen in the robust, still ongoing annual print collections that pull their vigor from multiple, simultaneous perspectives on the work produced. Inuit women quickly became indispensable to the co-operative, and they continue to be among the leading artists as the print collections are successfully marketed to Western audiences.

Pitseolak Ashoona is one of Canada's most celebrated female artists. Her drawings illustrate the stories of her life as a girl, a mother, and a wife. Pitseolak worked with the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative for twenty-five years, during which time she amassed a prolific collection of more than nine thousand images, of which 233 became prints in the official Baffin Island collections and were shown in more than one hundred group and solo exhibitions. Pitseolak recorded the traditional past of the

Inuit nomadic hunting society, who moved from camp to camp, living in igloos and skin tents depending on the weather, hunting seal, caribou, and sometimes polar bear, according to the season.⁴ Pitseolak first began drawing as a young widow left with six children. Her art was a way to bring money into the house, as she could take her drawings to the co-operative and be paid for them even before they became prints or part of the official collections. Relying on this modest but steady income, Pitseolak's family was able to somewhat ease the economic transition from traditional migratory-camp life to a more settled existence in Cape Dorset.

Caribou are the most plentiful large mammal of arctic and subarctic North America, and hold special importance in the traditional economies of these areas. "Caribou" is a French appropriation of *xalibu* or *qualipu*, the Mi'kmaq word for "snow shoveler." During annual fall migrations, the caribou are searching for easy access to their favorite food and a previously known place to give birth. The pregnant females lead the migrating herd. Leaving the cold taiga behind, heading south towards a warmer tundra at speeds of up to fifty miles per hour, the females travel to their lichen-rich birthing grounds. Indigenous hunters of the caribou, such as the Inuit, might hunt during fall migrations, or they might observe these migrations and hunt the caribou during the summer months. The Inuit have had an indispensable, multigenerational relationship with the caribou. The caribou, like the seal, are vital to every facet of Inuit life. Caribou are eaten as food and used to create clothing, tools, toys, tents, and the lamp oil that heats and lights igloos during the total darkness of winter. The lichens eaten by the caribou are a traditional food of Inuit hunters, who ceremonially consume the stomach contents of a freshly killed animal, grateful for access to this nutrient-rich, energy-dense food during a hunt.

Enhanced by printer Iyola Kingsatsiak's stenciled background, *Caribou Hunt* [Fig. 3] shows us hunters waiting behind or within a natural shelter. The stencil technique seen here was honed from the Japanese samples and instructions that Houston brought from Japan to Cape Dorset five years earlier. The lines and textures of Pitseolak's drawing permit

us to appreciate that the caribou hunters' approach their task with the same formality and respect as the seal hunter. The relationship of exchange and reciprocity between animal and hunter is clear in *Caribou Hunt*; hunters and animals begin their relationship by closely observing each other. Pitseolak's graphic elements and composition also allow us to see movement and activity amongst the waiting hunters. One hunter

Fig. 3

Pitseolak Ashoona
(Canadian) Inuit, ca. 1904–1983
Iyola Kingwatsiak, printer
Canadian (Inuit), 1933–2000
Caribou Hunt, 1964
Stonecut print with stencil on rice paper
Sheet: 33 × 51.4 cm. (13 × 20 1/4 in.)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James A. Houston 77.148.3
© Dorset Fine Arts





Proq. #E woman with doll Skin Cut Pitmeak 1904

appears to be scrambling over to join the other two. Typically, hunters would silently hold a finger (or fingers) aloft to indicate to their companions the number of animals that had appeared in the hunting ground. Humorously, the two hunters with weapons each hold up a different number. Could it be that the vantage point of the hunter on the right only allows him to see one of the two animals?

Woman with Doll [Fig. 4], one of Pitseolak's most recognized prints, relates to Inuit hunting traditions from a specifically gendered vantage point. Pitseolak's husband had been an eminent huntsman, enjoying great success in both seal and caribou hunting. Due to her husband's prowess, Pitseolak had easy access to hides and became a noted seamstress, and her attention to costume and dress is evident in her drawings, especially in this print. In *Woman with Doll*, the carefully drawn design of the hooded parka is regionally specific, and indicates the Kingnimuit Inuit family to which the woman belongs. The caribou skin is a source of pride for the Inuit seamstress; it has been hunted by her husband and is the material from which her traditional clothing is made. Pitseolak depicts her subject standing on the caribou hide to indicate this fundamental relationship. The doll could have been made by the woman when she was a young girl, as a means of developing her skills as a seamstress. The doll is held high in the woman's hand, and might also be considered an amulet or good-luck token. As an artist, Pitseolak noticed and precisely portrayed the details of the clothes, the relationships, and the chores of Inuit community life from a woman's perspective.

The artistic and spiritual aspects of material culture have always been critical to indigenous peoples. Inspired by Japanese printmaking technical skills and examples, Pootoogook, Pitseolak, and the dozens of other Inuit artists associated with the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative have studied the use of printmaking tools and techniques. They have applied the graphic elements of texture, balance, line, and color to depict the aesthetics of everyday Inuit life found in traditional practices and utilitarian cultural objects. The Cape Dorset print and drawing collections rapidly became and are still known worldwide for their technically sophisticated,

strikingly beautiful renderings of indigenous realism. Autobiographical, ecological, and historical, they incorporate large amounts of humor, myth, and fantasy.

In these stonecut prints from the RISD Museum collection, the Inuit reveal themselves as part of nature; they establish that they live within a network of environmental relationships, with a deep knowledge of the rhythms of their landscape. Inuit culture embraces spiritual values,

Fig. 4

Pitseolak Ashoona
Canadian (Inuit), ca. 1904–1983
Lukta Qiatsuk, printer
Canadian (Inuit), 1928–2004
Woman with Doll, 1964
Stonecut print on paper
Sheet: 53.3 × 37.2 cm. (21 × 14 7/8 in.)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James A. Houston 77.148.2
© Dorset Fine Arts

traditions, and practices reflecting these connections to their culture, to each other, and to the living earth. Inuit culture is grounded in a web of relationships of respect and reciprocity, with reverence and gratitude for the wisdom of elders.

It is important to consider the environmental and social crises that the Inuit currently face—particularly the rapid climate change in the circumpolar regions, and the state and corporate violence and exploitation of natural resources done to Inuit communities, resulting in high rates of poverty, trauma, and suicide within those communities. While the Inuit have always lived a low-carbon sustainable lifestyle and do not greatly contribute to human-mediated climate change, theirs are among the world's most climate-change-affected communities. Melting sea ice, reduced snow cover, and thawing permafrost have already reduced and made more inaccessible the animals that are part of traditional Inuit relationships of reciprocity and exchange. Climate change has disrupted their cultural patterns of hunting and food sharing. These Cape Dorset prints evoke Inuit traditions, but they should also remind us that indigenous responses to social and environmental challenges, as well as to aesthetic inspiration, are complex and dynamic, constantly being created and adapted.

The stonecut prints of Pootoogook and Pitseolak should not be viewed as inert depictions of the traditions of a time that has passed, but rather as reminders of the contingent, historically situated, reciprocal and responsive nature of Inuit cultural life. These evocative prints help us remember what is required for a people to be tied to each other in community and to the animals and land that supports them. They can be understood as a reaffirmation of the awareness that there is no separation between nature and culture. The Inuit prints represent the exchanges between cultures, between hunter and animal, between hunter and artist. These beautiful prints are Inuit stories—always relevant, eternally inspired by and responsive to change.

- 1 Paul Nadasdy, "The Gift in the Animal: The Ontology of Hunting and Human-Animal Sociality," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (2007): 25.
- 2 Norman Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration; Early Printmaking in the Canadian Arctic* (Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation, 2011), 24–59.
- 3 Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 2–11.
- 4 Pitseolak Ashoona, *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*, edited by Dorothy Eber (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971).
- 5 Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 105–43.
- 6 Pitseolak, *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*.
- 7 Odette Leroux, Marion E. Jackson, and Minnie Aodla Freeman, eds., *Inuit Women Artists: Voices from Cape Dorset* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1994), 18.

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The Head in Focus

Benin Art and Visual History

Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi

The discovery of these treasures resembles that of a valuable manuscript. They are a new “Codex Africanus,” not written on fragile papyrus, but in ivory and imperishable brass.¹

Benin art has held the imaginations of scholars and art dealers spellbound since the turn of the twentieth century. It was the first noted example of African art to truly confound racist assumptions and ethnocentric prejudices when it first came to Western attention after the tragic British punitive expedition of February 17, 1897, during which the Benin kingdom was sacked by British colonial forces, and the reigning king, Oba Ovonranwmen, was captured and sent into exile. The old Benin kingdom’s influence was widespread in the area described as the Lower Niger, located in present-day Nigeria, southwest Nigeria, and across swaths of areas on the West African coast. Whereas Benin art was greatly admired and treated reverentially by Western audiences upon its discovery, as the cited commentary suggests, the

FIG. 1
Benin
Head of a King (Oba),
probably 18th century
Bronze
26.7 × 19.7 × 21.6 cm. (10 ½ × 7 ¾ × 8 ½ in.)
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 39.054

kingdom and her artists were at the same time inscribed “within a racialized discourse of degraded savagery.”² (Today the Benin kingdom, a shadow of its former glory, comprises mostly Benin City, the capital of Edo State in southern Nigeria.)

The Benin kingdom’s corpus of palace art, as seen in the head of a king in the RISD Museum collection [Fig. 1], highlights the technical mastery and artistic accomplishment of Benin artists over the ages. RISD’s head consists of a crown of intricately crosshatched beads, bold jutting knots on two sides of the crown, four flowing threads of beads with stops close to the base, and two strips of braided hair that dangle at both sides of the face. Cast in bronze, the crown mirrors the coral-bead headdress worn by the oba (king). The actual beaded crown consists of tiny red beads stitched together with brown vegetable fiber. The beads carry the essence of the office of oba. A single cowrie shell sits on the forehead, flanked by three scarification patterns called *ikharo* above each amplified eye. The tubular bead-collar covers the neck and chin, extending all the way to the lower lip. With its remarkably stylized features, the crowned head is a portrait of elegant symmetry and dignified comportment. The absence of a flange at the base suggests that it is an eighteenth-century-style commemorative head. The object is one of the two Type 3 heads belonging to the Middle and Late periods in the classification of Benin art, per the late anthropologist Philip Dark.³

In many African societies, the human head holds significant symbolism. It is explored at length in forms and performances (including masking traditions). Although the human body is equally celebrated as a reliquary that carries the soul in the mortal life and afterlife,⁴ the head holds deeper ramifications. It determines the individual as marker of personal identity and physical identification, and ties the individual to family, ancestors, extended family, and community. More importantly, it determines a person’s destiny. Among the Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria, the head is the wellspring of wisdom and seat of divine power (*àse*). The head is divided into the external head (*orí òdè*), emblem of individuality, and the interior or spiritual head (*orí inú*), the life source that controls the outer head. Ontologically, though all inner heads look the same, they are essentially different when bestowed on individuals.⁵ If one is bestowed with good inner head, the person’s *àse* ensures success in life. As such, the head is cast proportionally bigger than other parts of the body in visual representations, whether it is rendered naturalistically, stylized, or in abstract form.⁶ The three modes of representation have different symbolic undertones. Similarly, the Benin considers the human head as imbued with spiritual energy (*ehi*) placed by the creator-god



2

Osanobua and his eldest son, Olokun; this energy guides the mortal individual throughout his or her lifetime on earth. Ultimately, the sculptured head is a corporeal memento in honor of revered deceased individuals such as ancestors. When it is covered with a coiffure, crown, or headdress, such elaborate details are emphasized.

RISD's head of a king holds added significance and prestige as an altar object that honors a royal ancestor. For the Benin, commemorative heads are idealized portraits commissioned by an incoming oba to honor his departed predecessor as part of the extravagant coronation ceremony. The

portrait of King Osemwende (1816–1848) [Fig. 2], in the collection of the Rietberg Museum, Zurich, is an example of a commemorative head that has been connected to a specific oba. Other examples abound in Western museums, such as the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, which has one of the biggest repositories of Benin art.

FIG. 2
Nigeria, Kingdom of Benin,
court workshop
Portrait of King Osemwende, ca. 1810
Bronze
The Rietberg Museum, Zurich

FIG. 3

Oba Ewuare II,
installation ceremony.
Benin City, October 20, 2016.
Photo courtesy Dr. Peju Layiwola, Nigeria

FIG. 4

Bronze and brass heads at the foot
of Oba Ewuare II's throne.
Royal Palace, Benin City, October 20, 2016.
Photo courtesy Dr. Peju Layiwola, Nigeria



3



4

In accordance with longstanding traditions instituted during the reign of Oba Ewuare I in the fifteenth century and which survived the changes that came in the wake of the punitive expedition, a new king's commission for the production of a commemorative head is a physical act of ushering the most recent king into the pantheon of ancestor-kings. The new head is placed alongside others on the royal ancestral altar in the palace of the oba. Except in unusual cases, the deceased predecessor is usually the father of the new oba. One notable example from history was during the tumultuous seventeenth century, when the kingdom was embroiled in a civil war after the death of the last warrior king, Oba Ehengbuda, and following the short reign of his son, Ohuan. Different factions of the royal family vied for the titular kingship in the absence of a direct line of descent. By venerating and memorializing their predecessors through corporeal representation, successive obas enabled the practice of visually inscribing Benin history.

Typically, the crown prince, or *edaiken*, undergoes an elaborate and demanding ritual process. He is escorted from the palace of the heir-apparent in Uselu, where, upon the death of the oba, he has repaired for ninety days, and he slowly proceeds through various important sites in the kingdom, accompanied by Uselu chiefs. His first stop is at the sacred palm tree, Udin Amamieson-aimiuwa, at the

outskirts of Benin City. He climbs the tree symbolically, a practice that harks back to the fifteenth century, when Oba Ewuare I established it. The crown prince then continues to Usama to complete several important rites, including picking his dynastic name. Usama was where Oranmiyan, the progenitor of the post-Ogisos dynasty, built the first palace, and where succeeding obas lived until the palace was moved to the center of Benin City by Oba Ewedo in late thirteenth century. Finally, when the heir-apparent reaches the royal palace in a triumphant procession and great fanfare in the company of palace chiefs, heralded by traditional songs and outpour-

ing of solidarity by his people, he is formally declared the oba, taking over the throne of his fathers. At the recent coronation of Oba Ewuare II on October 20, 2016, commemorative heads accompanied his final installation ceremony in memory and honor of his departed father, Omo n'Oba n'Edo Uku Akpolokpolo Erediauwa, and his royal forebears [Fig. 3]. The objects were placed at the foot of his throne and around the palace room where he welcomed visitors [Fig. 4].

Traditionally, the oba combines political and religious authority. Before colonialism, he held sweeping powers over his subjects. He was the nominal owner of Benin land and final adjudicator of justice, and controlled external trade, among other roles. Although his political power has waned and is now largely ceremonial since the end of colonial rule in Nigeria, he still commands the total respect of his subjects, owing to his divine kingship. Perhaps more in the past than in the present, the oba was the arbiter of taste, introducing aesthetic criteria and affirming or critiquing styles and technical approaches and the resulting forms. As the custodian of Benin culture, the oba aligned artistic production with cultural values and communal idiosyncrasies. The most skilled members of the casters' and carvers' guilds produced palace objects, interpreting the royal perspectives and conveying the highest ideals of Benin aesthetics. It is in this sense that the objects plundered during the British sack of Benin were significant cultural achievements, perfected over many centuries and bearing the royal seal of approval.

Many innovations in Benin art are traced to the time of Oba Ewuare I (circa 1440 to 1473), the first warrior-king and empire builder. The introduction of commemorative heads and large metal sculptures and forms into the Benin corpus is attributed to him. Though Benin metalsmiths already worked in brass and bronze before his time, Oba Ewuare I reorganized the guild systems by family and rewarded them with important titles based on technical competence and innovative ideas and techniques. Legend holds that he commissioned the royal guilds of casters and carvers to create his portrait. Whereas the casters portrayed an idealized image of the king at the prime of life, the carvers accurately captured his old age at the time of the commission. In his anger, Oba Ewuare I elevated the casters' guild (*Iguneronmwon*) above the carvers' guild (*Ighesanmwan*). Scholars have cited this piece of oral history as proof for the formal introduction of the commemorative bronze heads, dating it to about the fifteenth century.⁷

As oral traditions suggest, it was also during the reign of Oba Ewuare I that the stately beaded dress worn by the oba and the council of chiefs was introduced. He is also credited with introducing the coral-bead crown,

which has become an important insignia of the monarchy. Though the oba alone can be entirely bedecked in coral beads, from his crown to his dress, as one of his praise names—“child of the beaded crown, child of the beaded dress”—suggests, the oba reflects a wider Benin sartorial outlook. This is on full display during august occasions and ceremonial events such as the coronation (*Ugie Erha Oba*), which celebrates and honors the royal lineage, and at the annual *Igue*, one of the most important ritual ceremonies, devoted to safeguarding and enhancing the spiritual power of the oba. During these ceremonies, the oba’s wives, the council of chiefs, and high-ranking members of the Benin kingdom dress up in ceremonial attire, bead necklaces, and headdresses, as was the case during the final installation ceremony of the new king Oba Ewuare II, the thirty-ninth oba of Benin, on October 20, 2016. At the ceremony, people turned out in large numbers in ceremonial wear and beads, showcasing the elegant and fastidious attention the Benin pay to bodily appearance and self-presentation.

Founded by Edo people, ancient Benin was one of the most powerful of Africa’s historical kingdoms known to the European world. Benin’s first rulers, the *Ogisos* (sky kings)—who claimed direct descent from the creator-god Osanobua through his youngest son, Idu—created a nascent state by integrating autonomous settlements, according to Benin oral traditions. An important economic power in an area described as the Guinea Coast in old maps (comprising present-day West Africa), Benin was already a thriving city-state and warrior kingdom when Portuguese explorer Duarte Pacheco Pereira visited in the 1490s. Art in Benin served multiple functions, ranging from commemoration, ancestral deification, and trade to historical documentation and literary purposes. Benin people are profoundly proud of their past successes, which were documented and advanced from the Benin court’s perspective.⁸

The commemorative heads provide a sense of a chronological outline of the Benin past. Together with other sculptural forms produced by the guilds of royal casters and carvers, they chronicle political, militaristic, social, economic, and religious histories of the kingdom. Whether the art in question is cast in brass, bronze, or any other form of metal or carved in ivory or wood, contestations and debates remain in respect to chronological sequencing tied either to dates or dynasties. Many scholars recognize the excellent work done by the late anthropologist Philip Dark in creating a typology of the Benin cast traditions to align with a chronology of Benin kings. Similarly, a lot of work has also been done by conservators in analyzing material compositions of Benin art, but outcomes vary and remain inconclusive.⁹

FIG. 5
 Edo peoples
 Altar Portrait of an Oba
 18th century
 Bronze
 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 9 × 9 in. (29.5 × 22.9 × 22.9 cm.)
 The Menil Collection, Houston
 Photo: Paul Hester



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Relatively speaking, RISD's head is of a different style when compared to the Menil Collection's altar portrait of an oba [Fig. 5], whose provenance is traced directly to the Benin royal court, having once belonged to a British colonel who participated in the infamous sack of Benin. Unlike RISD's bronze head, the Menil Collection's example has a flange encrusted with defied zoomorphic forms (such as the royal leopard), as well as mudfish, crocodiles, and pythons associated with the revered water goddess Olokun. The flange became an essential part of commemorative heads in the nineteenth century, suggesting innovations in Benin's visual practice that were catalyzed by transfer or adoption of new techniques, availability of new materials, and introduction of new

aesthetic ideas. In addition, whereas RISD's head appears tilted backward in its orientation, the Menil Collection's portrait seems sturdier and ramrod straight. The ears of the two heads are also different, which could either signal an artistic or symbolic intervention. Both stylized heads are remarkably different from the more naturalistic uncrowned head [Fig. 6] in the Saint Louis Museum's collection, although all three are altar pieces, displayed in the palace's shrine. The uncrowned heads, or trophy heads as they are now called in scholarship, are considered the earliest examples of Benin bronze heads. There is a consensus that they are also the first examples of Benin heads produced using *cire perdue* or lost-wax, a traditional method of metal casting that involves creating a wax model, covering it in clay to create a mold, heating to ease out the wax, adding liquid metal to the vacant space, and then leaving it to firm. The heads produced using the *cire perdue* technique vary from the smaller and thinly cast to more sophisticated larger and thicker examples, which suggest improvement in casting techniques as time went by.



FIG. 6
Unidentified Edo artist
Commemorative Head,
15th–18th century
Bronze, iron
7 ¹¹/₁₆ × 7 ¹/₄ × 6 ³/₈ in.
Saint Louis Art Museum,
Museum Purchase 12:1936

Quite often, notions of cultural authenticity and artistic purity are ascribed to historical African art, negating a long history of cultural exchange and economic relationships between the African continent and the rest of the world. Benin art is a good example where the impact of external and internal mercantile connections is strongly felt in visual representations and artistic mediums. For example, the Benin's first contact with Europe, according to known records, was with Portuguese traders in the fourteenth century, and it had significant cultural ramifications. Changes in representational styles in Benin sculptures as typified by the commemorative heads and in ivory carvings capture some of the assimilation of outsider ideas and influences.

Some of the excellent casting techniques and use of new materials such as copper came with the Portuguese, whose image also became part of the visual lexicon in Benin art, signaling militaristic might and affluence. The intricately carved long ivory tusks that sit atop royal portraits in the traditional altar settings (and are absent in museum settings) are excellent indicators of the adoption of Portuguese carving techniques, presenting hybrid representations of locals and foreigners alike. Examples abound of the iconic image of Portuguese sailors finely attired in period clothing, Portuguese coats of arms, and equestrian figures. In addition to supplying Benin with firearms and mercenaries to wage their wars, the Portuguese also supplied Benin with the highly coveted coral beads in larger quantities, and with brass manilas that were melted for casting.

Furthermore, studies have shown that although the practice of placing the carved ivory tusks on commemorative heads and royal altars started in the early seventeenth century, the practice of this display increased significantly in the early eighteenth century with increased ivory trade between the Benin kingdom and Dutch merchants.¹⁰ The higher commercial value of ivory resulting from international trade enhanced the material's social and symbolic capital and was reflected in ritual and artistic practices. In a sense and in addition, cultural auras and values of the Benin's trading partners were organically assimilated, as shown in the art. It can thus be argued that while the commemorative heads illuminate the dynastic history of Benin, the ivory carvings—including those created as souvenirs for the European market, which clearly represent the prosperity that attended the glory years of empire—visually narrate the economic history of the kingdom.

Although visual records show that the Portuguese had a tremendous impact on Benin art through the introduction of brass and new carving techniques, the earliest outside influence on Benin art came from their immediate neighbors, particularly the Yoruba. Oral traditions suggest that Oba Oguola requested a master caster from the Oni of Ife, who sent Iguegha to him. Iguegha introduced several styles and techniques, including the lost-wax casting technique, and became deified upon his death, worshipped ever since by the guild of brass casters.¹¹ The naturalism achieved earlier on in Benin art, as seen in the uncrowned or trophy head, is attributed to a virtuosity learned from Ife, the ancestral heartland of the Yoruba.¹² Naturalistically rendered and idealized terra-cotta commemorative heads are part of the corpora of both Benin and Yoruba arts, although there are stylistic differences which are culturally specific. For instance, whereas the Benin terra-cotta heads are more robust looking, with rounded cheeks and eyes, the Ife terra-cotta heads have leaner features. Also, the scarification patterns run from top to bottom on the Ife heads, while those on the Benin heads are often three or four incisions above the eyes.

In addition, several cultures abutting the kingdom, such as the Igbo (neighbors farther to the east) and the Igala (in central Nigeria), would have influenced Benin art, and vice versa. Trophy or uncrowned heads (such as the Saint Louis Museum's collection's example) are decapitated heads of defeated kings, a practice of headhunting attributed to the Igbo.¹³ The heads were sent to guilds to be cast in bronze or brass to be included in the Benin war altars memorializing the kingdom's great victories in major battles, such as those against the Igbo and Igala,¹⁴ and/or to serve as a cautionary note to potential renegade vassal states.

The Benin's artistic achievements, among the most revered and celebrated in African art, continue to fire contemporary imagination. Though the sovereignty and influence of the present-day Benin kingdom have been largely diminished, its rich ritual traditions continue to thrive, having withstood the force of the colonial encounter. The year 1997 marked the centenary of the punitive expedition, the historic event that changed the fate of the last holdout against British colonial forces in Nigeria. A life in exile in Calabar for Oba Ovonramwen, the last precolonial king, and his subsequent death in 1914 marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new chapter for the kingdom as a part of Nigeria. In 1914, the British colonial power restored the role of the oba, allowing Oba Eweka II to ascend the throne of his father, Ovonramwen, and amalgamating its southern and northern protectorates to create the country of Nigeria.

The kingdom's visual history unfolds with greater vigor each time we engage RISD's head. We are forced to ask critical questions about its former life as an altarpiece that served important ritual function for the Benin people, as compared to its status today, as a museum object admired for its aesthetic qualities and as a vector of Benin's cultural past. The goal is not to point accusatory fingers, as Oba Erediauwa (1979–2016) stated in his opening speech during the centenary event.¹⁵ Instead it is to seek fresh pathways for the past to enlighten the present.

Depending on which side of the art-historical debates one finds oneself, Benin art has either remained stuck in pre-punitive expedition aesthetics and styles or has evolved in small increments since the monarchy was reestablished in 1914. Art historian Joseph Nevadomsky charges that "virtually all of the art historical work devoted to Benin takes 1897 as its *terminus ad quem*," with less regard for innovative strategies that have continued to flourish in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁶ Similarly, Charles Gore argues that that major innovations in casting techniques and accompanying social practices in the twentieth-century have not attracted sufficient art historical attention. Yet, as he equally suggests, present-day Benin art remains wedded to its precolonial past. In part, this is the result of its success in the Western imagination, boosted by the intellectual work of art historians and anthropologists and the subsequent allure of commodification.¹⁷ Or perhaps, and beyond the demands of the market, the post-1914 royal court and guilds of casters and carvers have been nostalgic for the precolonial glory days of the kingdom, longing for an authentic Benin identity that only the visual past can provide.

Yet as Benin's visual history has shown, if we are to consider the ingenious hybridism that attended the arts over the many centuries preceding the punitive expedition, the royal palace and the various artistic guilds have always responded to a changing world. The reliance on stock imageries and forms which now constitute cultural heritage might be understood as the way in which the oba and the Edo people today reimagine and negotiate what it means to be Benin in postcolonial Nigeria, against the backdrop of existential conditions and the force of contemporary globalization.

- 1 O. M. Dalton, "Booty from Benin," *English Illustrated Magazine*, vol. XVIII (1898), 419. Cited in Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 7.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Philip J. C. Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).
- 4 Alisa LaGamma, "Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary," *African Arts* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 32–43.
- 5 Babatunde Lawal, "Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 91–103.
- 6 Rowland Abidoun, "Àse: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power Through Art," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 24, fasc. 4 (November 1994): 309–22.
- 7 Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin*, rev. ed. (London: Trustees of the British Museum; Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 33.
- 8 Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin*, rev. ed., 20.
- 9 See, for example, Frank Willett, Ben Torsney, and Mark Ritchie, "Composition and Style: An Examination of the Benin 'Bronze' Heads," *African Arts* 27, no. 3 (July 1994): 60–67.
- 10 Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin*, rev. ed., 37.
- 11 Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, rev. ed., (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 1968, 12).
- 12 See, for example, Douglas Fraser, "The Fish-Legged Figure in Benin and Yoruba Art, in *African Art and Leadership*, ed. Douglas Fraser and Herbert M. Cole (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: The University of Wisconsin Press), 261–94.
- 13 Barbara Blackmun, "Altar Heads," in *African Art from the Menil Collection*, ed. Kristina Van Dyke (Houston: Menil Foundation, Inc., 2008), 128.
- 14 Charles Hercules Read and Ormonde Maddock Dalton, *Antiquities from the City of Benin and from Other Parts of West Africa in the British Museum* (London: British Museum; Longman and Co [first ed.], 1899), 6; cited in Ben Amos, *The Art of Benin*, rev. ed., 39.
- 15 Oba Erediauwá, "Opening Ceremony Address," *African Arts* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 30–33.
- 16 Joseph Nevadomsky, "Contemporary Art and Artists in Benin City," *African Arts* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 54–63.
- 17 Charles Gore, "Casting Identities in Contemporary Benin City," *African Arts* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 57.

Pia Camil

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“This visual essay mixes images of past works like *A Pot for A Latch* and *Divisor Pirata* alongside research documentation taken throughout Mexico City of informal markets and alternative modes of exchange. These range from street markets to dollar stores and other visual references that help inform my work.”

Issue—3

1 Frame: Display handbags, downtown Mexico City
Inner Frame: Aerial view of Ciudad Neza, Mexico City
Center image: ***Divisor Pirata*, documentation of performance organized by NuMu Museum, Guatemala City, 2016**

2 Frame: Display heads, downtown Mexico City
Inner frame: Shop display with grid panels, downtown Mexico City
Center image: ***Pot for a Latch*, New Museum exchange day, NYC, 2016**

3 / 4 Frame: Banana object donated during exchange day of *Pot for a Latch* exhibition, New Museum, New York City, 2016.
Second-hand cloth bundle in Las Torres market, Iztapalapa, Mexico City.
Display chains in downtown Mexico City
Background: ***Pot for a Latch* installation shot. Metal grids and donated objects from general public, New Museum, NYC, 2016**

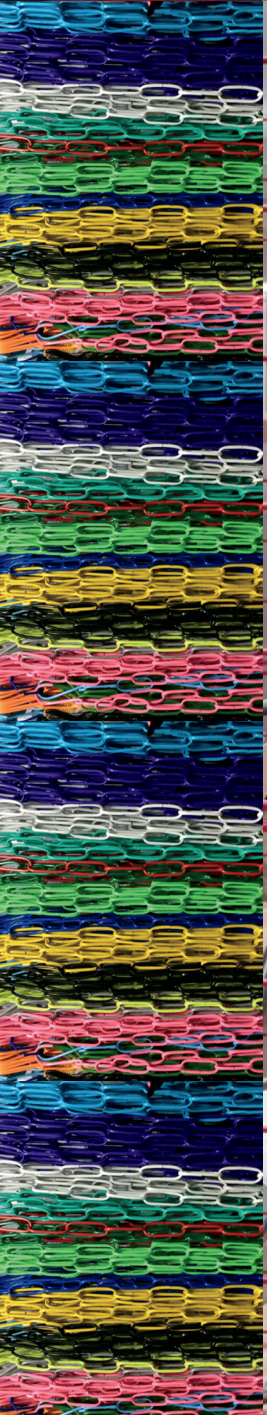
Left image: Instagram picture of exchange object for *Pot for a Latch* @eksnel
Right image: Instagram picture of sweatshirt exchange for *Pot for a Latch* @colecocole

5 Frame: Street documentation photograph of beauty shop in downtown Mexico City
Image: ***Divisor Pirata*, secondhand t-shirts (from Las Torres market, Iztapalapa, Mexico City) 6 x 14 m., 2016**

6 Frame: Documentation photo of Beauty shop in Harlem, NYC
Inner Frame: ***Gaby's t-shirt curtain*, secondhand t-shirts (from Las Torres market, Iztapalapa, Mexico City), 3.1 x 34 m., 2016**
Image: Seamstress women collective, Iztapalapa, Mexico city, 2016





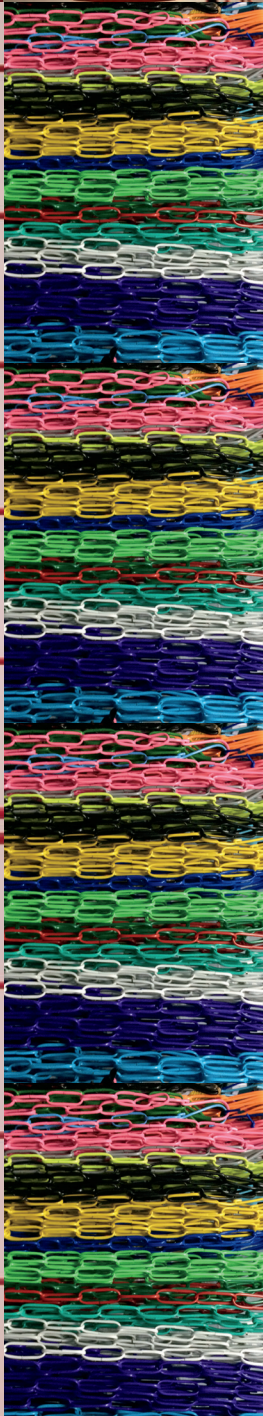
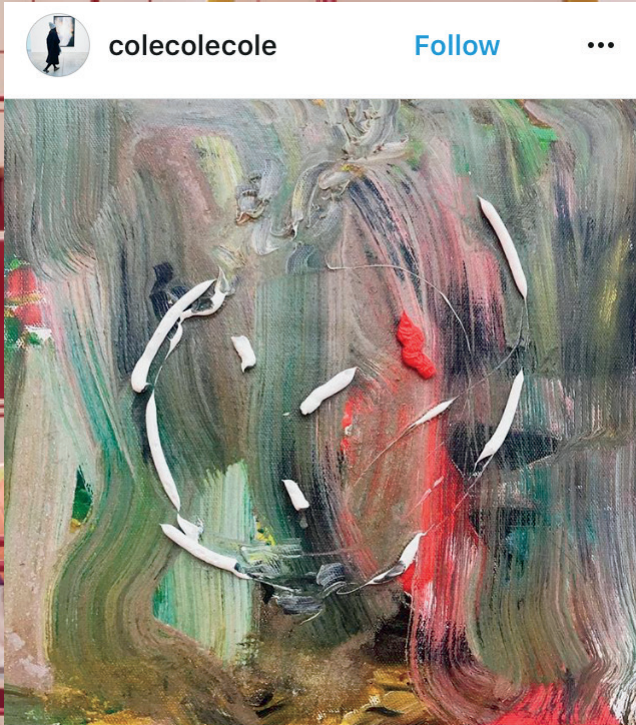
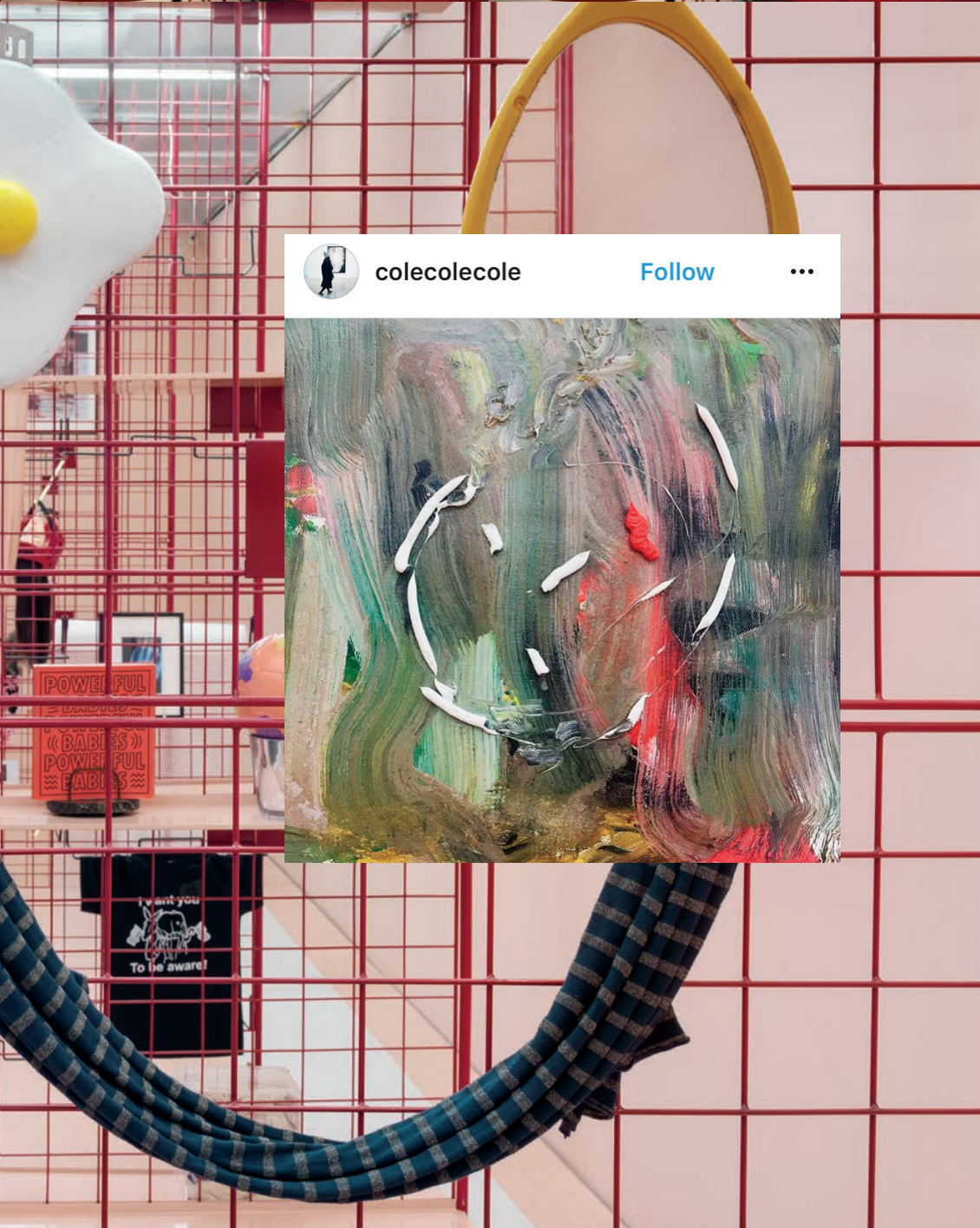


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Shakee.át Entanglements

Robert W. Preucel & Alexandra M. Peck

Native American objects rest uneasily within art museums. Removed from their original contexts of use, they have been historically resignified as “primitive,” “exotic,” and representative of the mythic Other. Exhibited as material signs of progress, advancement, and civilization, they are largely silent about their makers’ desires and intentions. Today, Native American objects are reclaiming new voice. Many art museums are adopting more inclusive approaches to representational practice and are engaging with Native American peoples and objects in new ways. These approaches are fostering exciting conversations about the intersections of European and Native American ontologies and aesthetics.

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Issue—8

FIG. 1

Native American (Tlingit)
Thunderbird and Whale Frontlet
(*Shakee.át*), late 19th century
Wood, abalone shell, pigment
19.1 × 14.6 × 5.1 cm. (7 ½ × 5 13/16 × 2 in.)
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.154

In the spring of 2016, we were invited by the RISD Museum to survey their small but distinguished Native American collection. We have been identifying the objects and making exhibition (as well as digital and archival) recommendations. Many of the items are donations from alumni and often do not have detailed provenience. A group of eighty-seven objects, however, were acquired in 1944 as part of an exchange with the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. The Heye Foundation was founded in 1916 as a prominent research institution focusing on the American Indian, and its collections now comprise the core of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. We contacted Ann McMullen, a curator at the NMAI and head of collections research, who provided us with a complete set of documentation for the Heye Foundation objects.

George Gustav Heye was a New York banker who became enamored of Native American material culture and formed a vast archaeological and ethnological collection that he housed in his museum at Audubon Terrace in the Bronx [Fig. 2]. When he died in 1956, it is said that he had acquired more than one million objects representing “both the highest artistic expression of Indian cultures and the evidence of everyday life.”¹ Heye positioned himself at the center of the Native American collecting network and he purchased many of his Northwest Coast objects from noted collectors, such as George T. Emmons, Thomas Crosby, Leo

Frachtenberg, T. T. Waterman, and D. F. Tozier. These collectors specialized in the material culture of specific tribal groups. For example, Emmons, a U.S. Navy lieutenant, collected among the Tlingit people of southeast Alaska.

A small subset of the NMAI objects have been repatriated to the Tlingit tribes and Native Alaskan corporations under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990.² One of the most famous of these repatriations was the return of the Bear Hat (known to Tlingit speakers as *Xoots Shada Koox*) to the Tlingit Chilkat Indian Village of Klukwan, Alaska.³ This crest hat is considered an “object of cultural patrimony” under the law, and was shown to have been inappropriately removed

FIG. 2

George and Thea Heye at the Museum of the American Indian. New York City, 1917. Photo courtesy of National Museum of the American Indian Archives (P11582)



from the village. As Joe Hotch, president of the Chilkat Indian Village, put it, “Receiving the Bear Hat was more than the return of an important cultural object; it was like the return of a family member.”⁴

The RISD Museum has an outstanding Tlingit headdress that was acquired as part of the Heye Foundation exchange [Fig. 1]. It is a special kind of headdress known as a frontlet, and is used by several different Northwest Coast peoples. It originated among the Tsimshian of British Columbia’s central coast, and was quickly adopted by the neighboring Tlingit and Haida people.⁵ Unlike Haida frontlets, characterized by a single large figure, and Tsimshian frontlets, which often depict small faces or figures surrounding a large figure, Tlingit frontlets commonly portray a large primary figure and a smaller secondary one.⁶ Traditionally, high-ranking Tlingit men wore these headdresses along with special ceremonial regalia, such as Chilkat robes and dance collars, at memorial potlatches [Fig. 3]. Today, frontlets are worn at traditional events as well as public dance celebrations, such as the biennial celebration program sponsored by the Sealaska Heritage Institute.

The RISD frontlet is a rectangular wooden plaque with primary and secondary figures in the center and abalone shell inlay around the edges. Like most Tlingit frontlets, it is carved out of alderwood and painted blue, red, and black. Several of the inlaid shells have perforations indicating previous lives as part of a necklace or perhaps earrings. The frontlet’s central carving appears to represent a bird with a slightly hooked beak (partially restored) holding an animal being torn in half. The Heye Foundation’s catalogue card, however, provides a rather different description: “Head ornament of wood, carved to represent a man holding the head of a mountain sheep, red, black, blue painted decoration, Tlingit.” Unfortunately, the card does not identify where the item was collected, or from whom it was purchased.

So, here we have a contradiction. Our observation suggests that the frontlet depicts a bird splitting an animal in two, while the catalogue card identifies the image as a man holding the head of a mountain sheep. How might we go about resolving this issue? Catalogue cards are valued in the museum world as a primary source of documentation, but they are sometimes incorrect because of errors that can arise in the transferral of information from the original document to the object record. We also know that archives related to turn-of-the-century Native American art are often incomplete as a result of flawed interpretations and cultural misunderstandings. Native informants often held back the meanings of objects from collectors in an effort to retain symbolic control over the objects leaving the community.



The standard approach might be to approach the problem from a material-science perspective. For example, we can identify the abalone inlay as green abalone (*Haliotis fulgens*) coming from the western coast of Northern California. This identification draws attention to the distant trade relationships between the Native peoples of Northern California and the Tlingit of southeast Alaska. We suggest that a productive way to enhance this interpretation is to honor the frontlet's Tlingit origins and grant primacy to cultural context. By incorporating Tlingit concepts into our analysis, we can develop a richer understanding of the frontlet's meaning and traditional use. The interpretation of Native objects is always a "give and take"—a tacking back and forth between Western and non-Western contexts—to reveal the many layers of meaning.

In the Tlingit language, the frontlet is called a *shakee.át*, translating literally as "a thing on top." The word *shakee* means "something with a rounded top, like a mountain," "above it," or "elevated over it."⁷ The word *át* refers to a "thing." The name thus highlights the location of use—on a person's head—and calls attention to the agency of the object in lending distinction to a high-ranking person. The Tsimshian name for frontlet, *amhalait*, translates as "for dancing or twirling."⁸ Here the name characterizes the object in motion. The root word *halait* is generally translated as "dance," "dancing," or "dancer," and references someone who has an extraordinary gift or spiritual power, often a medicine man, shaman, or initiate. The Tsimshian name is thus ontologically richer than the Tlingit name, which is more descriptive. This difference supports the idea that the Tlingit people borrowed the headdress style, but not the underlying concept, from the Tsimshian people.

Another insight into Tlingit ontology is provided by a category of things classified by the word *at.oow*, translated as "an owned or purchased thing."⁹ These belongings are the inalienable possessions of a particular Tlingit clan, and play a special role in Tlingit society in that they take on the characteristics of living beings. They are typically created, named, used, given away, and retired according to strict protocols. For example, objects become *at.oow* when they are publically validated at a memorial potlatch by being given a name and having money given out on their behalf.

The identification of the frontlet's central image is critical to interpreting clan ownership. Tlingit clans are traced by matrilineal descent within a dual social division known as a moiety (either Eagle or Raven). The central carving on Tlingit frontlets usually references a clan crest or emblem and depicts an important event in the clan's

FIG. 3

Tlingit silversmith Jim Jacobs wearing a *shakee.át* headdress. Sitka, Alaska, 1931. Photo courtesy of the Alaska State Library, Luella Smith Photo Collection (ASL-P110-05)

mytho-history. Each clan has a primary crest, a moiety crest, and a number of secondary crests that together distinguish it from all other clans. This crest system connects all people who have the rights to the same clan identity and specifies their relatives in other clans. Crest objects can thus be seen as a material genealogy, since they physically materialize the deeds and experiences of ancestors. Crests become clan possessions usually through an otherworldly encounter or the loss of life of a clan member. For example, the *Chookaneidi* clan claims the glacier as one of its crests because one of its clanswomen died on a glacier. For this reason, the glacier is represented as a central motif on their crest blanket.¹⁰

The RISD frontlet is incomplete; it is missing key elements of the headdress. In its finished form, the wooden plaque would be fastened to a cloth-covered cylindrical frame covered by white swan down and attached to a long “cape” or trailer covered with white ermine pelts. Frontlets are typically decorated with whiskers of the Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) and tail feathers of the red-shafted flicker (*Colaptes auratus cafer*), standing erect atop the wooden plaque. Each material carries its own special significance. For example, the flicker is believed to serve as a messenger between upper and lower worlds. Similarly, the ermine cape refers to the winter potlatch season when the ermine’s fur turns white. The abalone shell with its brilliant iridescent blue is thought to represent the sky world.

We consulted Harold Jacobs, a Tlingit scholar, in an attempt to identify the frontlet’s central carving.¹¹ He immediately recognized it as a “classic example” of the Thunderbird and Killer Whale crest.¹² The Thunderbird and Killer Whale story is popular among many Northwest Coast peoples and is represented in multiple forms, such as totem poles [Fig. 4]. The Thunderbird is a large, powerful bird that feasts upon whales during storms. Whenever thunder claps, it signals that the Thunderbird has just swooped down and captured a whale for its dinner.¹³ The Thunderbird’s nest, positioned on top of a high mountain, is littered with whale bones, the remains of its meals. Few people claim to have seen Thunderbird seize a whale, as the bird usually renders its observers ill or blind.¹⁴

Fossil whale remains have been reported from a lake near Clayoquot on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. According to James Swan, an ethnologist working among the Northwest Coast Native communities in the 1850s, the Quileute and Chimakum communities of Washington regarded whale fossils as evidence of great feasts of the Thunderbird, who caught the whales in the ocean, deposited them near the lake, and

FIG. 4
Haida Thunderbird and Whale
Mortuary Pole Replica,
carved by Nathan Jackson.
Totem Bight State Historical
Park, Ketchikan, Alaska



then devoured them.¹⁵ Geologists have speculated that the Thunderbird and Whale story may be an indigenous account of a tsunami triggered by an earthquake at the Cascadia subduction zone separating the North Atlantic and Juan de Fuca plates.¹⁶ Significant earthquakes have occurred in this region for thousands of years, thus potentially rooting the story in the far-distant past.



An almost identical *shakee.át* [Fig. 5] is held by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.¹⁷ It was collected by Tlingit ethnographer Louis Shotridge in 1924 at Huna, Alaska. Shotridge's fieldnotes indicate that it was called the "Hunting Thunderbird" and formerly owned by Anlenyet, a member of the *Kik.sadi* clan of Wrangell, Alaska. The object was gifted to the *T'akdeintaan* clan of Huna, most likely during a potlatch, in honor of a maternal relationship linking the two clans. Shotridge explains that the carving represents the Thunderbird tearing a whale in two. Because of stylistic similarities between the Penn and RISD objects, Harold Jacobs thinks that the RISD *shakee.át* may have been made by the same carver. This finding suggests that it too could be from Wrangell.

Even with this detailed contextual information, it is difficult to appreciate a *shakee.át* until you see it danced. For the Tlingit people, dance is a central means of expression, communication, and storytelling, as well as a form of entertainment. Frontlets are popularly referred to as “dancing headdresses” because of their role in dancing.¹⁸ Traditionally, the cylindrical “inner” part of the headdress was packed with eagle down, although today goose down is often used. When a performer dances vigorously, the down flies out, spreading peace and good wishes amongst the potlatch guests. The *shakee.át* is also danced as part of the *yeik.utee*, also called the Blanket Dance, often performed at potlatches [Fig. 6]. In this dance, a blanket is held vertically to create a theatrical stage. One or two dancers stand behind it so that only their headdresses are visible.¹⁹ The dancers then move their headdresses back and forth along the top edge of the blanket in time to the music for the entertainment of the audience.

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FIG. 5

Thunderbird and whale frontlet (NA6834) from Huna, Alaska. Courtesy of the Penn Museum, image #196047

FIG. 6

Tlingit elder George Jim dancing the *yeik-utee* dance at a totem-pole raising. Kake, Alaska, 1971. Photo courtesy of Alaska State Library, Kake Potlatch Photo Collection (ASL-P263-109)



The Tlingit *shakee.át* is a semiotically rich object. The headdress style was borrowed from the Tsimshian people, and this usage may have required a payment. Its very materials embody the opposition of the sea and sky worlds—the ocean is symbolized by the sea lion whiskers, and the celestial is represented by the abalone, eagle down, and flicker feathers. Some of its materials, such as the abalone, were acquired through trade with neighboring tribal communities. The Thunderbird and Whale carving indexes the instability of ocean and sky during times of seismic stress and may even refer to a historical event. These multiple entanglements give the frontlet its dynamic agency, enabling it to communicate and sacralize a social order that links people together in the clan system and places certain individuals “above” others according to their inherited status.

For us, interpretation is a dynamic process of moving back and forth—a giving and taking—as we test out our ideas against Native American concepts

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and worldviews. This exercise is an inherently collaborative process that necessarily involves reaching out to museum professionals and Native Alaskan colleagues. By integrating ethnographic research, Tlingit oral histories, and scientific analyses, we are able to offer compelling accounts of the meaning and likely provenience of this remarkable *shakee.át*. More generally, the triangulation of these different ways of knowing allows us to reanimate Native American objects and learn from their makers, past and present.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Amy Pickworth, Ann McMullen, Harold Jacobs, Alessandro Pezzati, and Lucy Williams for their research and editorial assistance. We dedicate this essay to the memory of Teri Rofkar (*Chas' Koowu Tla'a*), *Takdeintaan* clan, Snail House, Huna, Alaska.

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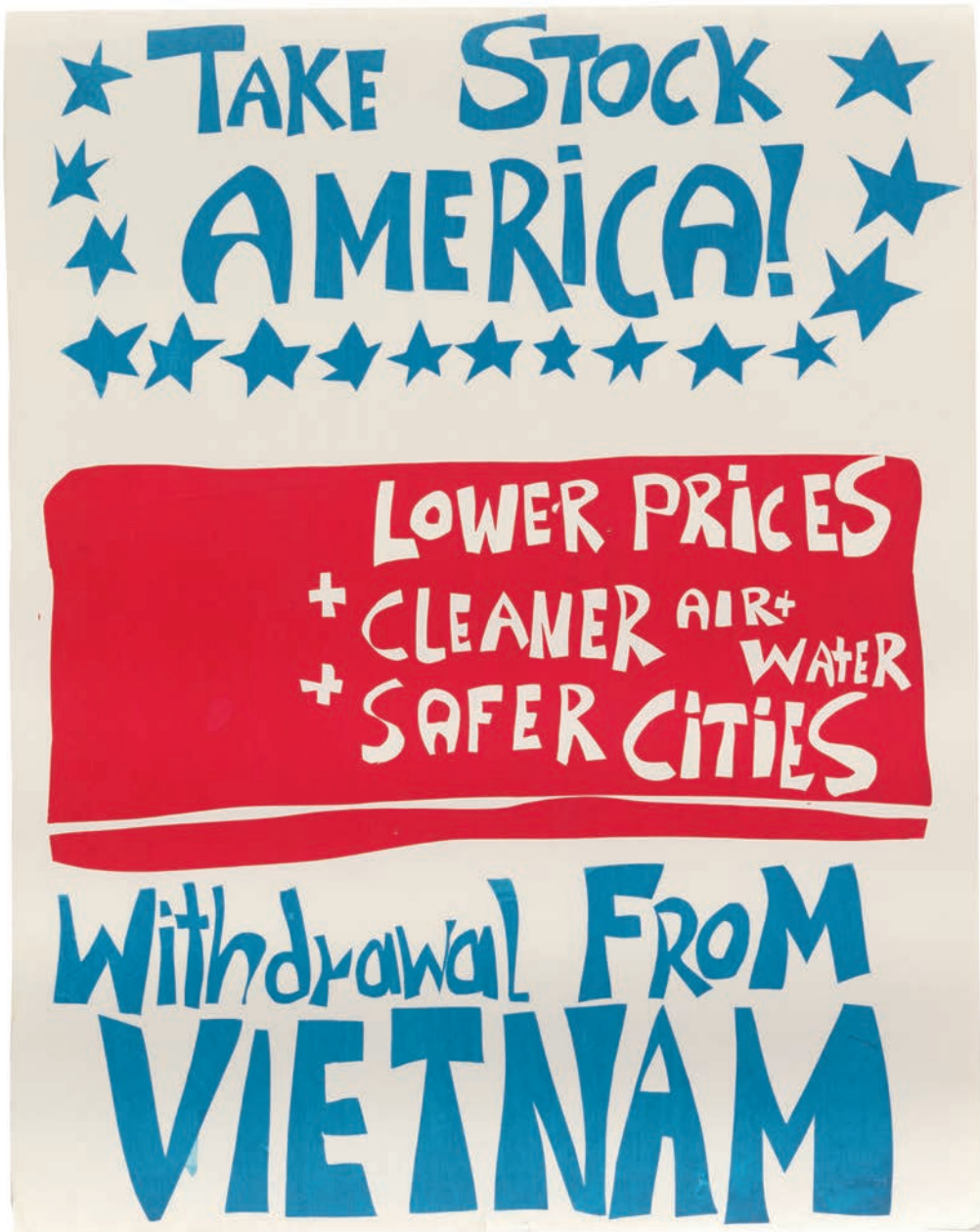




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EMANCIPATION



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“O What a Tangled Web We Weave”

Intersecting Threads in a Scottish Paisley Shawl

Kate Irvin

Many of us have likely experienced the sensory pleasures of at least touching, maybe even swaddling ourselves in, the unfathomable softness and warmth of a shawl made of pashmina or cashmere. It is also probable that the now-ubiquitous teardrop-shaped mass of swirling vegetation, a motif called “paisley” in Europe and North America, has featured on some piece of clothing in each of our closets, maybe on a scarf, shawl, or tie. It is likely, then, that this early nineteenth-century silk and wool rectangular woman’s shawl [Fig. 1], made in Great Britain (quite likely in Paisley, Scotland), its end borders sporting a regimental march of large paisley motifs against a subdued white center section, will appear enticing though familiar, perhaps even quotidian.

FIG. 1

Scottish, probably Paisley
Shawl, early 19th century
Silk twill weave with wool and silk
supplementary weft patterning
Length: 308.6 cm. (121 ½ in.)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 34.797

The story of this shawl might seem squarely neat and genuinely authentic—what more can be said of a so-called paisley shawl made in Paisley, Scotland?—but there are a great many twisted strands of exchange and competition to unravel as we delve into its production and aesthetic history. Complex cross-cultural histories unfold as we investigate the making, marketing, and wearing of this accessory.

The oft-quoted line from Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott’s 1808 epic poem “Marmion”—“O what a tangled web we weave / When first we practice to deceive”—relates particularly well to this shawl. In the context of the poem’s narrative, the metaphor of the web refers to the romantic machinations and deception perpetrated by the story’s principal character, and his ultimate fall as he becomes irrevocably enmeshed within the crisscrossing threads of his multifarious lies. This is a web made not by the straightforward grid of plain-woven warp and weft (following strict social mores) but rather a chaotic structure of unruly threads. Extracted from the poem and applied to circumstances in Scott’s Scotland at the time of the poem’s publication, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the phrase takes on other moralizing tones that are relevant to RISD’s woven shawl. Herein lies a tangled web indeed.

Very likely woven in Paisley, Scotland, around 1815, the shawl’s pattern (though not its material or technique) quite faithfully references the luxurious and famed Kashmiri pashmina shawls that had captivated the imagination of fashionable European women and filled the coffers of British East India Company merchants since the late 18th century [Fig. 2]. RISD’s shawl was made some forty years after Europeans received the first imports of the astonishingly sumptuous textiles woven in the paradisiacal but hotly contested Kashmir Valley, a region located in the northernmost area of the Indian subcontinent. Since the late sixteenth century, under the patronage of Central Asian Mughal rulers who conquered much of Northern India, including the Kashmir Valley, Kashmir’s workshops in the city of Srinagar and its environs became internationally renowned for their unique production of delicate textiles most often worn

by men as shoulder mantles or as waist sashes [Fig. 3]. For hundreds of years, these textiles were prized and worn by elites in royal and aristocratic circles in India, Central Asia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire, and were offered by rulers as gifts of honor to their entourage and important guests.

Europeans, in fact, were late in succumbing to the lure of Kashmir’s production. It wasn’t until the mid-eighteenth century that British East India Company officials began carrying back pashmina mantles as gifts and souvenirs, then

FIG. 2

Indian (Kashmir) for export
Shawl, ca. 1815
Goat fleece double-interlocking
twill tapestry weave
Length: 295.9 cm. (116 ½ in.)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.331



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officially importing them in an attempt to monopolize the market. In no time, wealthy European women were draping Kashmiri shawls around their shoulders to advertise their status and taste, as well as to stave off the cold brought on by cladding themselves in the lightweight cotton or silk of the high-waisted columnar dress, the reigning fashion in the decades around the turn of the eighteenth century [Fig. 4].

In Kashmir, these shawls were woven of *pashm*, the superfine fibers that comprise the winter undercoat of the Tibetan mountain goat. Culling and preparing these extremely delicate fibers, imported into Kashmir from Tibet, was time-consuming, and the weaving of complex floral patterns with the whisper-thin yarn proved even more arduous. Skilled weavers sat at a loom using thin wooden bobbins to hand-weave the intricate patterns in a technique called *kani*, or double-interlocking twill tapestry weave. This laborious technique enabled the weavers to compose detailed, multicolored motifs with such exactitude that they appear



almost as if they were painted or printed instead of woven. A slow process, it sometimes took years to complete a piece, making the finished garment highly coveted and expensive, accessible only to the wealthy elite.¹

English and French merchants prospered by importing these exorbitantly priced riches from Kashmir to Europe. Owning such rare luxuries from afar also increased the prestige of those women in Europe who could afford them. However, the weavers and middlemen in traditional centers of production in Great Britain were far less enthusiastic about these textiles that mesmerized their potential clients and cast a shadow over their livelihood. By the late 1700s, manufacturers in Norwich, England, and Edinburgh, Scotland, had started experimenting with making shawls that imitated the Kashmiri luxury examples in appearance and texture. Accessing quantities of wool that were as lavishly soft as the *pashm* sourced from Tibet proved impossible, despite attempts to naturalize and rear the Tibetan mountain goats in the British Isles.² Searches for alternatives led entrepreneurs from Norwich and Edinburgh to the Scottish town of Paisley, a former center of fancy-silk-gauze weaving that had been hit by a depression in the early 1800s and was ready for new ventures.³

Woven around 1815, RISD's shawl exemplifies the early years of Paisley's shawl production. Since the mid-eighteenth century, silk weavers in Paisley had enjoyed immense prestige as community leaders known for their skill, education, and increasing wealth. Their product—a delicate, transparent gauze made of raw silk imported from China and Piedmont, Italy—was exported throughout Europe and into Russia and even favored at the court of Marie Antoinette in France.⁴ As the demand for silk gauze faded due to the vagaries of fashion, Paisley's weavers rallied their fancy-silk-weaving skills to the new vogue for shawls made in imitation of the extravagant Kashmiri imports. By the 1820s, Paisley exported its shawls to Turkey, Persia, and even India, selling there as “Paisley Kashmir.”⁵ By 1840, this enterprise had proven so successful that shawl weaving developed into the town's sole industry, a trade that flourished until the demise of the fashion for shawls in the 1870s.

In material and structure, RISD's Scottish shawl differs considerably from the Kashmiri originals. First, it is made primarily of silk, the fiber that Paisley artisans were accustomed to weaving, and a thread much

stronger than wool substitutes for *pashm*. Silk also has a hand, or touch, that best approximated the soft suppleness of the Tibetan mountain goat's undercoat. Later refinements to the thread production included wrapping fine wool or even *pashm* around a silk core to better imitate the original. As an early example that predates such

FIG. 3
Portrait of a Courtier, Bijapur School,
ca. 1610–1620.
Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper.
British Museum BM ME OA 1937 4–10.03
© The Trustees of the British Museum

FIG. 4

Horace Vernet, illustrator
 French, 1789–1863
*Illustration from the Journal des Dames
 et des Modes*, 1802/1803
 Engraving on wove paper, hand colored
 21.3 × 13.5 cm. (8 3/8 × 5 3/16 in.)
 Museum collection INV2004.506

experiments, RISD's shawl includes a central white field that comprises silk in both warp and weft directions, while the patterned ends incorporate colored wool in addition to silk to delineate the motifs.

Structurally, the pattern emerges from a specialized hand-operated loom called a drawloom, a piece of equipment thought to have originated in East Asia and used for centuries across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe to create complex woven textiles. Instead of weaving the design by hand in blocks of color, as was done in Kashmir, the drawloom weaver relied on the loom's patterning harnesses, manipulated by a weaver's assistant called a draw boy, to articulate the pattern as the wefts were laid in the horizontal direction. A diagonal twill-weave structure mimics the look of the Kashmiri twill tapestry shawls, but a close look shows the pattern issuing from the harness system as an exact repeat across the width of the textile, appearing almost pixilated, in contrast to the miniscule and unique variations that inevitably result from the Kashmiri process likened to "painting with thread" [Fig. 5]. Hence the comparatively disciplined march of the floral motifs, nonetheless replete with vegetation, which, at the time this shawl was woven, had not yet acquired the name "paisley."

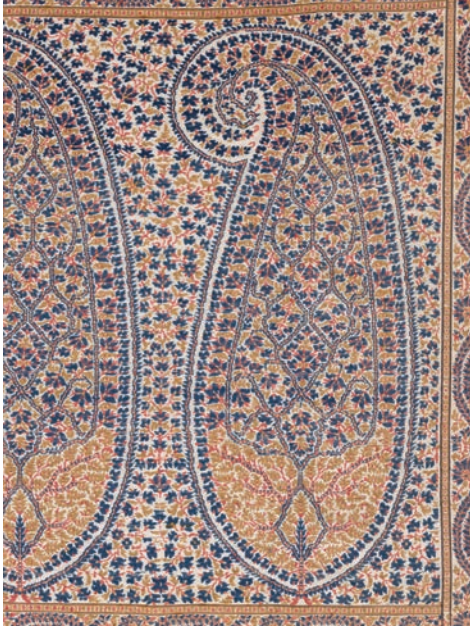
The history of the shawl's stylized floral motif—which over hundreds of years developed into a teardrop shape with a curling tip—stretches much further back in time than the period in which this example was produced, and its origins lie much farther afield. Before the motif became so closely entwined with the town of Paisley in the mid-nineteenth century, it was labeled "pine" or "cone" (even by the weavers in Paisley), "tadpole" in France, and "little onion" in Vienna. In India in more recent years, it has also been likened to the fruit of a mango tree, as well as to a gourd or pitcher plant, but in India and Iran it has traditionally and most consistently been called *boteh*, meaning "flower."

Some scholars theorize that the *boteh* developed in the ancient Near East, specifically Babylon, from the shape of a bird's wing or leaf form that evolved into the representation of the young shoot of a date palm, considered to symbolize the tree of life. Others track the beginnings of the Kashmiri *boteh* to the image of a single flowering plant, established in Persian art by the 1600s and soon after blossoming in textiles produced in northern India under the patronage of Mughal emperors. Whether originating in leaf or flower, the *boteh* became more elaborate as it crossed cultures and as weavers and other artisans incorporated it into the designs of objects made to suit the tastes of a variety of consumers across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.⁶



FIG. 5

Scottish, probably Paisley
 Shawl (detail), early 19th century
 Silk twill weave with wool and silk
 supplementary weft patterning
 Length: 308.6 cm. (121 ½ in.)
 Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 34.797



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The early designs of the *boteh* in Kashmiri *pashm* textiles in particular illustrate the fluid exchange between Indian Mughal and Persian court cultures from the 1600s, as well as the influence of European herbals, or botanical drawings, that were circulated, studied, and admired within Mughal court workshops. In an early eighteenth-century example [Fig. 6], we see naturalistically depicted flowering shrubs or stalks with just a hint of the plant leaning to one side at the top, a style that developed into the primary way of drawing the *boteh* beginning in the nineteenth century. As the eighteenth century progressed, the plant becomes heavier and more bulbous in shape at the bottom, and begins to show an impossible variety of flowers issuing from its branches. By the early nineteenth century, when RISD's shawl was woven, vegetation increasingly blossoms within the *boteh* motifs, also invading the spaces between [Fig. 7]. As the century progressed, the *boteh* became almost entirely subsumed under the density of pattern upon floral pattern—highly stylized and a far cry from its earliest predecessors.

The evolution of the *boteh* motif, as described above, resulted from the tastes of the successive Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh ruling elite in Kashmir, who controlled and subsidized the workshops from the late sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, as well as from the specific preferences of the diverse and wide-ranging consumers who by the nineteenth century spanned the world from the East Asia to the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Kashmiri and Indian artisans elaborated upon an ancient tree-of-life foundational image, but with the input of a multiplicity of consumer demands in regard to shape, color, material, and density of pattern. Thus, when English, Scottish, and French weavers sought to capture their own share in this market by replicating the pattern and design format of Kashmiri shawls, they were claiming a product that was, in part, shaped by their own home markets. The focus in this artisanal tug-of-war lies not necessarily in the motif aesthetic—whether it

is *boteh*, paisley, or pine—but rather in the questions (judged by consumers, merchants, and design critics) of who made a better product and who produced it faster (and therefore more economically).

By creating their product on the drawloom, Paisley weavers in the first decades of the 1800s produced shawls much more quickly than their Kashmiri counterparts. (This process would become even more efficient with the widespread adoption of the jacquard loom by the 1830s.) The drawloom's mechanism, however, limited them to creating relatively stilted and rigid versions of the Kashmiri motifs. And none of the materials at hand, even silk, came close to approximating the warmth and ethereal waft of *pashm*. Sometimes so-called “Thibet wool” (imported *pashm* fibers) was incorporated to mimic the texture, but, as one of Walter Scott's fictional characters notes in his 1827 novella *The Surgeon's Daughter*, the differences in quality from the Kashmiri examples marked them as the “imitative operatives of Paisley.”⁷ By most period accounts, differences between Paisley and Kashmiri shawls were most discernible, and the latter were regarded as superior. This was accentuated by the fact that they were costly and thus more exclusive.

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FIG. 6

Indian (possibly Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh)
 Man's Sash (*Patka*), early 1700s
 Cotton plain weave with silk satin-stitch
 embroidery
 Length: 263.5 cm. (103 3/4 in.)
 Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.276

By the mid-nineteenth century, Paisley weavers had embraced the jacquard loom, speeding up production. With this new technology, workers who drew the patterns and plotted them out to be woven on the loom were able to delineate designs so intricate that Kashmiri weavers were forced to compete by speeding up their process, adding embroidery to their shawls or piecing together parts woven by several individuals to make a whole. Despite these innovations, British design reformers and popular-fiction writers (such as Walter Scott) nonetheless touted the Kashmiri shawls as exemplary products that, in their view, represented pure and traditional culture untainted by the base commercial interests of their countrymen. As stated by the author of “Shams and Imitations, especially in woven fabrics” a report in the *Journal of Design and Manufactures* published in 1851, the British imitations of cashmere shawls, in particular printed versions, were “a sort of material falsehood,” plain and simple.⁸ Credence and favor were directed toward the Kashmiri “original” that put the so-called mass-produced imitations to shame.

Design arbiters’ criticism of Scottish and English shawls simulating Indian precedents grew into full-fledged outcry by mid-century, fueled by those wealthy few threatened by the wider availability of luxuries once only accessible within their tight circles. In these decades, increasingly mechanized shawl production in Scotland would spark conversations and criticism of the types of designs classified as imitations and fakes, or, alternatively, as quality products of “good design.” Woven circa 1815, a shawl such as the one investigated here, on the other hand, would have been perceived when it was made as referencing, perhaps even slyly mimicking, riches from lands far away, but not with the purpose of misleading the consumer. It would have fallen into the category of yet another iteration in a long-established network of cross-cultural exchanges made in response to commercial interests spanning the globe. Just as Persian weavers sought to reproduce India’s luxury shawls for their home market in the same period, so did English, French, and Scottish weavers attempt the same.

FIG. 7

Scottish, probably Paisley
Shawl (detail), early 19th century
Silk twill weave with wool and silk
supplementary weft patterning
Length: 308.6 cm. (121 ½ in.)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 34.797



Paisley weavers adapted their expertise to survive and prosper in a changing, increasingly industrialized world, weathering criticism from design pundits along the way—as did the Kashmiri weavers, concurrently. Sadly, both centers of artisanal production collapsed in the 1870s as Euro-American women’s fashions changed significantly enough to obviate the need for a loosely swathing shawl, and as demand in other parts of world waned as well. In Paisley, cotton spinning and weaving supplanted the silk industry through the mid-twentieth century, but today even that work has disappeared, leaving historical markers but no living textile industry. Situated in a region mired in violent political conflict, the Kashmiri textile industry has also faded into the background even as its namesake fiber—cashmere—has surged in popularity and accessibility in recent years.

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The RISD Museum’s Paisley shawl quietly tells a significant story of interwoven, sometimes snarled, threads that intersect with diverse global narratives connecting Scottish and Kashmiri weavers across time and space. Notwithstanding its place within an increasingly tangled web, it cannot be argued that outright attempts to deceive the consumer played a role in the making of early Paisley shawls such as RISD’s. A product of the initial years of Paisley’s shawl-weaving enterprise, RISD’s shawl represents an earnest effort by talented weavers to revive local industry by riding the wave of fashion and building on preexisting, fruitful cross-cultural dialogues between producer, merchant, and consumer.

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¹ For more information on Kashmiri pashmina shawls see: Frank Ames, *The Kashmir Shawl and Its Indo-French Influence* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collector’s Club, 1986); Steven Cohen, et al., *Kashmir Shawls: The Tapi Collection* (Mumbai: The Shoestring Publisher, 2012); and Janet Rizvi and Monisha Ahmed, *Pashmina: The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009).

² Valerie Reilly, *The Illustrated History of the Paisley Shawl*, rev. ed. (Glasgow: Richard Drew, 1996), 20–21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kimberly Chrisman Campbell, “Paisley Before the Shawl: The Scottish Silk Gauze Industry,” *Textile History* 33, no. 2 (2002).

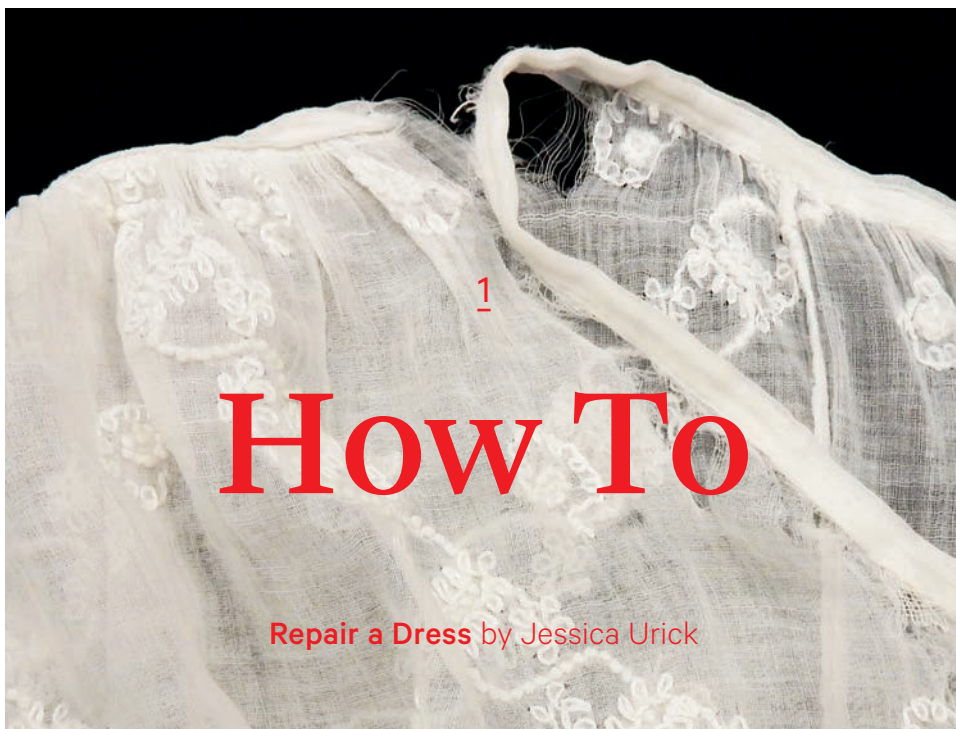
⁵ Pamela Claburn, “British Shawls in the Indian Style,” in Frank Ames, *The*

Kashmir Shawl and Its Indo-French Influence (1986; repr., Woodbridge, UK: Antique Collectors’ Club, 2004), 245.

⁶ For further discussion of the evolution of the *boteh* motif, see Ames, *The Kashmir Shawl*.

⁷ Suchitra Choudhury, “‘It Was an Imitation to be Sure’: The Imitation Indian Shawl in Design Reform and Imaginative Fiction,” *Textile History* 46, no. 2 (November 2015), 189.

⁸ As quoted in Choudhury, “‘It Was an Imitation to be Sure,’” 197.



How To

Repair a Dress by Jessica Urick

Conservation is a reciprocal process. It begins with listening to an object: considering the craftsmanship and intent of those who made it and assessing its needs. A conservator then responds with a treatment that will support the object's long-term preservation without altering its original character.

This early nineteenth-century dress was hand-made from Indian cotton in a style popular at the time throughout Europe and the United States. The cotton is lightweight and sheer, composed of finely spun yarns in a loose plain weave. Crafting a garment from such delicate fabric required care and precision, and the result is a diaphanous, striking representation of the time period in which it was made. The maker's skill is visible in tiny, accurate hand stitches and extensive embroidery. Historical repairs, including a small darned hole along the neckline, reflect a similar sensitivity to the fabric and its needs.

Historical cottons are susceptible to damage from many sources, including light, moisture, acidic storage conditions, and improper handling. Any of these factors could have contributed to several long, jagged tears along the right shoulder. Before the dress can be mounted for display, we must support these tears, decreasing the likelihood that they will worsen over time. The ideal treatment approach will honor the innate qualities of this remarkable fabric and the dressmaker's skill, offering longevity and support without detracting from the garment's structure or appearance.

American or European
Dress, ca. 1805
Cotton muslin with embroidery
Length: 132.1 cm. (52 in.)
Gift of Henry D. Ginsburg in honor of Cora Ginsburg
2000.103.8

< **Photo 1** (the shoulder before treatment)

Conservation treatments should be reversible, well documented, and minimally invasive. The technique used to repair this damage should be as sheer as the garment itself, while providing structural stability.



Photo 2

Cut a piece of silk crepe line—a very sheer, plain-woven support fabric—to the size and shape you need. This piece, called an underlay, will be attached to the inside of the dress to support the damaged area.

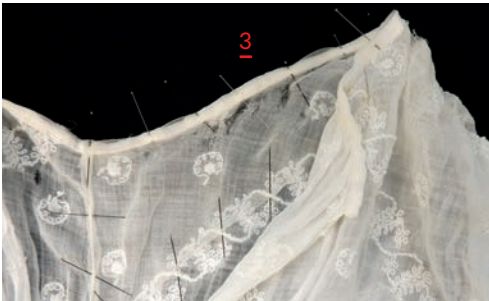


Photo 3

Attach the underlay below the tears with thin entomology pins—these will not leave visible holes in the dress fabric. Sew the underlay into place with small running stitches, using a fine hair-silk thread. It is best to conceal your stitches in stable, visually unobtrusive areas of the garment, such as binding, seams, and embroidered motifs.



Photo 4

Secure torn areas with “laid and couched” stitching: a length of thread is laid across the tear and tacked into place. Stitch primarily through the backing fabric when possible to avoid further damaging the dress fabric.



Portfolio

(1)

Austrian
Globe-Shaped Work Table, 1810–1820
Mahogany veneer, burl mahogany veneer, oak, ebony, boxwood, brass, pewter, mother of pearl, ivory, tortoiseshell, mirror, paint, engravings, velvet
Height: 97.8 cm. (38 ½ in.)
Gift of Mrs. Henry D. Sharpe 65.065

(2)

Rafael Ferrer
American, b. 1933
The Balata River: "In the mountains, there you feel free" (El Río Balatá: "En las montañas te sientes libre"), 1988
Oil on canvas
182.9 × 244.2 × 2.9 cm. (72 × 96 ½ × 1 ½ in.)
Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 1989.034
Art © Rafael Ferrer/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

(3)

Gertrude Käsebier
American, 1852–1934
Baron De Meyer with Cat, 1903
Platinum print
15.9 × 15.6 cm. (6 ¼ × 6 in.)
Florence Koehler Collection 49.017.1

(4)

Christien Meindertsma
Dutch, b. 1980
White sweater (cardigan), 2005
Hand-knit Merino wool
Center back length: 88.9 cm. (35 in.)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2009.22.3

(5)

Dave Cole
American, b. 1975
American Flag (Toy Soldiers #12), 2002
Acrylic on wood panel, plastic soldiers
46 × 83.5 × 9.2 cm. (18 ½ × 32 ½ × 3 ¾ in.)
Gift of Dr. Armand Versaci 2003.119
© Dave Cole

(6)

American (made at RISD)
Take Stock America!, 1969
Color screenprint on wove paper
57.1 × 44.8 cm. (22 ½ × 17 ¾ in.)
Gift of Joseph R. and Nadine F. Thomasson 2011.113.7

(7)

Scott Lapham
American, b. 1968
Providence Cold Storage #1, Demolished 1999, 1999
Gelatin silver print
Image: 38.1 × 48.3 cm. (15 × 19 in.)
Gift from the Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 2005.132.5
© Scott Lapham

(8)

R. Buckminster Fuller, designer
American, 1895–1983
Undersea Island-Submarisle, 1981
From the portfolio *Inventions: Twelve Around One*
Screenprint on two sheets: top on clear polyester film; bottom on Lenox rag paper
Sheets: 76.2 × 101.6 cm. (30 × 40 in.)
Gift of Hasbro, Inc. 1994.050.9A
Courtesy, Carl Solway Gallery and The Estate of R. Buckminster Fuller

(9)

J. W. Watts
American, active 1850
After Henry Walker Herrick
American, 1824–1906
Reading the Emancipation Proclamation, 1864
Etching, engraving, and aquatint on wove paper
Sheet: 48.9 cm. x 57.8 cm. (19 ¼ × 22 ¾ in.)
The Patricia Carroll Fitzgerald Mandel Print Collection 2011.96.7

(10)

Jacob Lawrence
American, 1917–2000
1920's ... The Migrants Cast Their Ballots, 1974
From the *Kent Bicentennial Portfolio: Spirit of Independence*
Color screenprint on paper
Image: 81.3 × 61.9 cm. (32 × 24 ¾ in.)
Gift of Lorillard 76.116
© 2017 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

(11)

Jean Blackburn
American, b. 1957
Template, 2002
Oil paint on wood, smaller chair cut from the larger
Large chair: 109.2 × 50.8 × 76.2 cm. (43 × 20 × 30 in.)
Museum purchase: gift of Joseph A. Chazan, MD 2013.3
© Jean Blackburn

(12)

Harry Callahan
American, 1912–1999
Chicago, 1953 (printed later)
Dye-transfer print
Image: 22.2 × 34.3 cm. (8 ⅞ × 13 ½ in.)
Gift of Manny and Skippy Gerard 2003.148.3
© The Estate of Harry Callahan;
courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

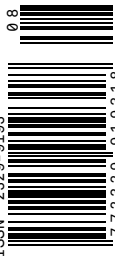


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